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Mahabharata

SOME OF ITS CHARACTERS



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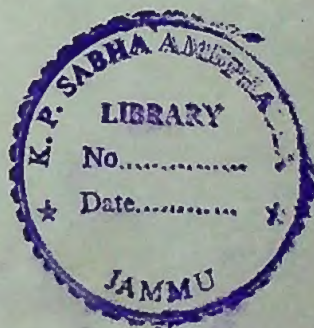
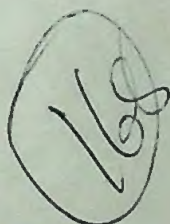
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MAHABHARATA SOME OF ITS CHARACTERS

To Sri Krishna

vamadidevah purushah puranah tvamasya visyasya param nidhanam
ettasi vedyam ca param ca dham tvaya viswamanatarupa.

Gita XI 38



SOUVENIR, 1989

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FOREWORD

The Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama published in 1988 a Souvenir—*Mahabharata*: its influence on Indian life and culture. This year the Ashrama is publishing the Souvenir: *Mahabharata*—some of its characters, which concludes the series.

Mathew Arnold, defining the epic form of poetry, said that the main story should relate to high personages and its language and metre should be simple and dignified. It should contain vigorous dialogues. It should have interludes in the form of episodes. It must have a high and noble purpose. In the light of this definition, we can surely call the *Mahabharata* an epic *par excellence*. The story relates to high personages belonging to the hallowed race of the Bharatas of high purity. The language used is simple, sonorous and dignified. There are a number of racy dialogues here and there, and a large number of episodes. The main objective of the work is propagation of Eternal Law, covering the four human ends—*dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. Of these Dharma and Moksha are regarded as the most valuable treasure.

The Mahabharata around its main episode of the Pandavas and the Kauravas contains myths and legends, Brahmanic philosophy, geographical matters, myths of Vishnu, Siva, fables, moral stories. The Mahabharata styles itself not only as an *Itihasa*, *akhyana* and *purana* but also as *kavya*, Dharma sastra, moksha sastra (based on Dr. P. L. Vaidya's article),

The encyclopaedic Mahabharata, like the night sky which contains millions of stars, planets, galaxies narrates about thousands of characters to give shape to its theme. We come across diverse characters and incidents. We read the romantic story of Dussanta-Sakuntala, the wonderful story of Savitri, the narrations of the rishis Sounak, Bhrgu, Jaratkar, Basistha, Biswamitra and many others. They have inspired people through the ages. The anecdotes and stories of the Mahabharata have not only entertained the minds of the people but taught them about *dharma* and good life. From these, poets and dramatists have received their materials for writing poems and dramas. In the characters of the Mahabharata there are many anomalies. But like the ducks which drink only milk from the surface of milk and water, people have accepted the good points of their lives. They have not looked at the dark sides of their heroes.

Out of the many important characters of the Mahabharata we have selected only a few for presentation in this volume. Surely we shall miss the characters of Vyasa, Sanjaya, Bhishma, Kripacharya, Balaram (all giants), Nakul, Sahadev, Abhimanyu, Arjuna, Shikhandi, Sanjoy and many others. But we are sure the readers will understand the limitations of such publications which cannot be exhaustive. The scholars have kindly portrayed the very limited main characters of the Mahabharata who have through the ages lighted up the path of the Indian and the ideal life and society.

We are thankful to Ramakrishna Math, Madras 4. The Math has published a book "Profiles in greatness" by Swami Sastrananda, From this book we have adopted an article—Sri Krishna : the man, the legend and the ideal .

We express our gratitude to Dr Lalita Sanyal, Dr S. P. Dubey, Dr Bimala De, Sri Narendra Prasad, Dr Bhagwan Prasad Majumdar, Prof M. S. Pandey, Vijay K. Thakur, Dr Bireswar Ganguly, Swami Amritanandaji, Dr Biswanath Mukhopadhyay, Swami Mahanandaji, Swami Sastranandaji, Dr Usha Verma, Dr Srivastava who have enriched the Souvenir with their valuable articles and to Bimala De for having looked through the proofs.

We take this opportunity to thank all those friends who have helped directly or indirectly, in connection with the publication of the Souvenir—advertisers, the collectors and our well-wisher Sri Nishit Kumar Bose, proprietor Tapan Printing Press, Patna for his care and attention in printing the Souvenir.

SWAMI CHANDRANANDA

Secretary

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama

CONTENTS

	Page
Mahabharata and Vedavyasa <i>Dr. Lalita Sanyal</i>	1
Moral Dilemma in the Mahabharata with special reference to Bhishma <i>Dr. S. P. Dubey</i>	5
Bidur <i>Dr. Bimalareshwar De</i>	16
Dhritarashtra <i>Sri Narendra Prasad</i>	21
Gandhari <i>Dr. Bhagwan Prasad Majumdar</i>	25
Yudhishthira <i>Prof. M. S. Pandey</i>	29
Bhishma <i>Prof. Vijay Kumar Thakur</i>	33
The Character of Prince Arjuna <i>Dr. Bireswar Ganguly</i>	42
Duryodhana <i>Swami Amritananda</i>	48
Karna <i>Dr. Viswanath Mukhopadhyay</i>	55
Arjuna Krishna—the divine being <i>Swami Mahananda</i>	59
Arjuna Krishna—the man, the legend and the ideal <i>Swami Sastrananda</i>	63
Arjuna (Hindi) <i>Dr. Usha Verma</i>	72
Arjuna (Hindi) <i>Dr. Arti Srivastav</i>	78

MAHĀBHĀRATA AND VEDAVYĀSA

By

DR. LALITA SANYAL
Patna University, Patna

Mahabharata is one of the noblest literary works in the world civilisation and the greatest in the whole of ancient Indian literature. The work is held in esteem all over the world as a source book for the history of Indo-European people. In the praise of this great epic, Vedavyasa, the author, says : *Yatha samudro bhagawan yatha hi himowan girih khyatabubhou ratnanidhi tatha bharatamucyate.*

(Swargarohanparva 5/66)

This great epic is also called Karṣṇaveda because the compiler is the most venerable Ṛsi Kṛṣṇa Dwaipayana, and it is held also as the 5th Veda. (Adiparva, 1/268). Mahabharata means the great narrative of the battle of the clans of Bharatas. In Ṛgveda Bharatas are mentioned as a warlike tribe. They are the descendants of Bharat, the son of King Dyusanta and Sakuntala. Some family feud in the royal house resulted in a fierce battle which almost ruined this ancient ruling race. This is regarded as a historical event and forms the nucleus of Mahabharata.

The date of Mahabharata has been argued upon by the scholars as 10th century B.C. It is generally accepted that the Mahabharata is not the work of one single author and consists of compositions which belong to different centuries. Mahabharata was never mentioned in Vedic hymns; but in Brāhmanas, Kurukshetra is mentioned as a battle field. In Atharva Veda 'Kurupanchal' word was used. Panini mentioned words like Yudhisthira, Bhima, Bidura and Mahabharata. Patanjali mentioned the battle of Pandavas and Kauravas for the first time. All these show that the original poem existed in the 5th or 4th century B. C. But as an epic the Mahabharata in its title and in its present form could not have existed before the 5th century A.D.

The Author's Origin :

Vedavyasa has given a part of his own biography in the first part of Mahabharata (Adivanshāvataraṇa parvādhya, Ādiparva). According to that Maharsi Vasistha was the great grandfather and Maharsi Saktri, the grandfather of him. Ṛsi Parasara became fascinated with the beauty of Satyavati, an adopted daughter of a fisherman chief. She had borne him a son in the island of the river Yamuna; hence the son was named Srikrishna Dwaipayana, i.e., Vyasa. Satyavati's another name was Matsyagandha as she smealt of fish. Parasara muni turned her to a sweetsmelling one by his occult power and the odour of her body afterwards began to spread over miles for which she was called Yojanagandha or Gandhawati henceforth. Kṛṣṇa Dwaipayana gave himself upto asceticism and lived in the Vadarikasrama in a forest

of the Himalayas. For this he was also known as Vadarayana. Satyawati was later married to Santanu of Kuru clan, a king of Hastinapur and bore him two sons, named Citrangada and Vicitravirya. Citrangada died very young and unmarried. Vicitravirya, too, died childless. To save the dynasty from dying out Satyawati asked Vyasa to beget descendants by the widows of his half brother according to the socially accepted and legal custom of Ksetraja child. The appearance of Vyasa, as the story goes, seemed very unpleasant—

Tasya Kṛsnasya kapilan jatan dipte calocone.
Babhruni caiba smasruni (Adiparva, 106/5.).

This caused Dhṛtarāstra born blind to Ambika as she closed her eyes seeing the frightful sight of the sage. Ambalika, the second wife of Vicitravirya, became pale with fear and Pandu was born to her as a pale son. Vyasa begot the third son, a quiet Vidura, by a maid. Later came the Kurus including the hundred sons of Dhṛtarāstra of whom Duryodhana was the eldest and Pandavas, the five sons of Pandu, who in their midst fought in the battle of Kuruksetra. Vedavyasa had the place of grandfather in reality of these heroes of this epic.

Vyasa never claimed the parenthood of his begotten children. He used to come in Hastinapur at the critical times whenever the Kauravas and Pandavas were in distress and gave them suitable advice and directions. He expressed with simplicity and truthfulness the ungraceful account of his birth and other details of the Kauravas and Pandavas. He was the genius amongst the literateurs of his time and had been a capable narrator. He was benevolent by nature. For instance, blind Dhṛtarāstra was anxious to know the day to day result of the war of Kuruksetra which was fought for 18 days. Vyasa very graciously made Sanjaya capable of seeing the war field without being present there and report the details to Dhṛtarāstra. Whenever any one wanted his assistance or remembered him he became aware of that and reacted to the situation accordingly. After Yudhishthira ascended the throne he was advised by Vyasa to perform Aswamedha Yajna. He previously tried his best to stop the war between the cousins but he failed. When Dhṛtarāstra and Gandhari lost all their sons in the war Vyasa consoled them and made them able to see the persons who had already died. He was consulted when these two along with Bidura and Kunti decided to leave the royal house in Hastinapur to take resort in the forest of the Himalayas.

The Style Of Composition :

Vyasa composed Mahabharata and imparted it to his pupil Vaisampayana and the latter recited it to king Janmejaya, the only descendant of the Kuru clan, during the snake sacrifice (sarpa yajna). There it was heard by Souti Ugrasrava, the son of muni Lomaharsana. Ugrasrava was entreated by the Ṛsis of Naimisaranya forest headed by Sounaka to relate the story and so he narrated Mahabharata to them all. Thus Mahabharata came into shape in Naimisaranya. Also the text was known as Jayākhyā Samhita.

Controversies And Discussions :

As for the length of this epic it is said that Ugrasrava knew this poem as consisting of 8800 verses but Vyasa said he composed the Samhita of Bharata poem in 24000 verses without its numerous episodes; and it contained one lakh verses including them all. For this, Mahabharata is called Satasahasri Samhita (Adiparva, Mahabharata). This hints at the fact that Mahabharata originally was a smaller poem and gradually grew into the present extent being sung publicly in kathaka style. Many scholars of both West and East do not regard Mahabharata as a work of one single author or even as of a talented compiler. Scholars are of opinion that in course of centuries numerous myths, legends, fables, fairy tales and parables were added to the main text of the original poem. How much of this great poetry belonged to the original text and how much was later added, will probably never be determined. They also believe that many of the episodes were recited by the bards as independent poems. A. Ludwig was of opinion that the great war a historical fact of a battle of nations, i.e., the nation of Madhyadesa and all the other nations of India. Even a conjecture was made that it was a fight between a warrior party on one side and a priestly party on the other. Acarya Suniti Kumar Chatterjee said that the dark complexion of Vyasa for which he was named Kṛṣṇa Dwaipayana was of significance. Satyawati, his mother, was also brought up by a fisherman king who belonged to a non-Aryan tribe. Draupadi, the common wife of the Pandavas, was named Kṛṣṇā also for her dark complexion. Kṛṣṇa, the friend and guide of the Pandavas, belonged to a race called Yadava which was a cowherd class and he was dark too. All these indicate towards the possibility of a war between the Vedic Aryans (i.e., priestly and higher class) and the non-Vedic tribes who had been down-trodden. However, many scholars take Mahabharata as a unified work composed by a poet in pre-Buddhistic times at least in some of the stages.

Concluding Remarks :

The identity of Vyasa is also controversial. Many are of opinion that Vyasa is a title for any versatile writer of olden days and all the works claimed to be composed by Vedavyasa are not by one person but by many. It is also said that Dwaipayana Vyasa and Vadarayana Vyasa were different persons. Brahmasutra was not written by the same Vyasa who wrote Mahabharata. All these points of difference make it difficult to arrive at any definite conclusion; but he has been traditionally taken for granted as the author of Mahabharata and contemporary to the great war of Kuruksetra. Vyasa is said to be the compiler of the four Vedas for which he is called Vedavyasa. Also the Puranas are believed to be his works. Dr. Surendra Nath Das Gupta observes that the attribution of all the Puranas to Vyasa is due to the tendency of Indian writers to increase the dignity of later works by attributing them to great writers of the past. Srimad Bhagavatgita, another famous work, is said to have been composed by Vyasa. This world famous scripture is spread over from the 25th to the 42nd subchapters in the Bhismaparva of Mahabharata. It contains the highest philosophical and synthetic thoughts propagated so far in India. Vyasa is

said to have arranged the Upanisads chronologically and summarised their essence in Sutras. Brahmasutra is a most difficult book of philosophical thought, which also is claimed as a work of Vyasa. With all these creditable works done by him, Vyasa is taken as the Guru of Hinduism although he had not established it as a religious order which originated as a synthetic religion from 4th century A.D. onwards.

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The path of contemplation is not easy.

The task of those whose minds are set on the Unmanifest is the more difficult; for, to those who are in the body, the realization of the Unmanifest is hard. But those who consecrate all their actions to Me (as the personal God, or as the divine Incarnation), who regard Me as the supreme Goal, who worship Me and meditate upon Me with single-minded concentration—for those whose minds are thus absorbed in Me, I become ere long the Saviour from the world's ocean of mortality.

IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA SRI KRISHNA TO ARJUNA

THE CONCEPT OF MORAL DILEMMA : ITS APPLICABILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

With Special Reference to Bhīṣma.

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Dilemma involves a crisis of choice between two or more alternatives. It arises in a situation where it is difficult to choose either one or the other course of action. Usually it is a situation of 'neither-nor' when one is in a fix and can do neither this nor that. One has then to take recourse to passivity which, at times, arouses a sense of guilt in one's mind. The sense of guilt usually arises in a moral situation where one is unable to act according to his normative inclination. The situation becomes as if, paradoxical and the individual is not able to take a decision to act this way or that way. Moral dilemma, therefore, can be said to be a moral situation involving a confrontation of the alternatives of seemingly equivalent nature. The expression 'seemingly' is being used specifically in this context because the term 'equivalent' is hard to determine in a normative realm. In the ethical context it is difficult to find exact equivalent situations. All we can say is that the alternatives may be more or less equivalent. It is mostly so because the moral judgment depends on objective considerations but it has great subjective fervour as well. In any concrete situation the ideal of morally objective judgment is neither fully possible nor plausible.

The Mahābhārata represents one of the noblest heritages of human culture where moral dilemma (dharma-pāśa) is felt and faced by many characters on various occasions. The entire text (of about one lac Sanskrit verses) is a document of interaction between several shades of ethical relations interwoven on a large family canvas. The stories of the epic have moulded the life and thinking of our country for centuries and continue to do so in the present. They will also contribute enormously to shape the Indian ethos for ages to come. Sukthankar, after many years of intensive study of the epic while preparing the critical edition rightly said : "We are it : I mean the real we".¹

With its gospel of dharma (normally used as an equivalent of the term 'morality') the Mahābhārata teaches us that the real conquest is not achieved in the battle-field. There is a battle against one's lower nature and it must be won. The epic has always emphasized on the fact that ultimate victory shall be of morality and righteousness (dharma). That is why the work is known as the Jaya, as is evident from its very first verse. The fact that moral integrity ultimately prevails is realised and expressed by several important figures of the Mahābhārata on different occasions.

The author of the epic, Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, warns King Dhṛtarāṣṭra of the consequences of favouring the path of unrighteousness by his one hundred sons. He clearly tells the blind ruler that where there is **dharma**, there will be victory. Bhīṣma repeats this to Duryodhana (initially designated as Suyodhana) when the latter charges the old General of favouring the Pāṇdavas in the battlefield. Droṇa, the teacher of both groups in the art of using arms, tells Yudhiṣṭhira that where there is moral integrity there is Kṛṣṇa and where there is Kṛṣṇa there is victory. Even Karna confesses in his secret talks with Kṛṣṇa and admits that Yudhiṣṭhira is the lasting ruler since he is the embodiment of **dharma**.

Although the **Mahābhārata** is taken to be a treatise on **dharma** (moral integrity), it is not a **dharma-sāstra** as it does not deal exclusively with morality. It also contains the art of creating and exploiting economic resources (**artha**) and the science of eroticism or aesthetic activity (**kama**). In fact it is a treatise on the three goals of human life, popularly known as **trivarga**. The author of the epic, in the end of the massive composition, laments for the people (virtually the entire society of his time) because they are unable to understand the maxim that prosperity and pleasure arise out of moral integrity.

The Indian tradition, as depicted in the **Mahābhārata**, does not treat the three goals of the individual (**purusārtha**) as independent of one another. Although the hierarchy of values is always admitted and maintained, the integral view of life has been preferred. The fourth or the ultimate goal of life, namely, **mokṣa** (salvation), is not much emphasized in the epic. It is implicit in the text that righteous living and moral integrity will automatically lead one to salvation. Explicit statements, of course, are not lacking in the context. But **dharma** is definitely given importance as the immediate means to salvation. The remaining two goals are taken to be subservient to **dharma** and are supposed to be regulated by it.

Since man is known as the moral agent, clashes in his moral perception take place due to a clash of means leading to the goal sought by him. The author of the epic shows that those who subordinate virtue to wealth land themselves in trouble and are led to total destruction, as it happens in the case of the Kauravas. In the Pāṇdavas camp Yudhiṣṭhira stands for moral integrity and righteousness. The other four brothers subscribe to interdependence of wealth and virtue. After the war is won they discuss the propriety of Yudhiṣṭhira's inclination to become an ascetic. They virtually subscribe to Kautilya's theory that one can enjoy if one does not violate virtue or wealth. Draupadi also persuades Yudhiṣṭhira to accept the kingdom once it has been won.

The major clash in the epic is, time and again, between moral integrity and survival needs (at times, to the extent of economic prosperity). The Pāṇdavas are willing to forego their rights of the kingdom even if five villages are given to them. On some occasions they are ready to give up even this demand. Arjuna, when confronted with his elders, relatives and teachers in the battlefield, refuses to take up

arms against them even if they kill him. Yudhiṣṭhira tells Kṛṣṇa that he would go to the forest because he has no interest in the war in view of Bhīṣma's constant pressure on the Pāṇḍava's army.

The Kauravas, on their part, hardly give preference to moral integrity. They usually go for prosperity and pleasure. Dhṛtarāṣṭra is normally convinced by them about the propriety of their stand to victimise the Pāṇḍavas. At times the blind King feels the suffocation but succumbs to the pressure of his sons. The only notable and graceful behaviour of Dhṛtarāṣṭra is when he makes Draupadī (also known as Kṛṣṇā) and her husbands free after the first gambling between Yudhiṣṭhira and Śakuni (representing the Kauravas, being their maternal uncle). That too happens when the sārī of Draupadī is enlarged by the divine agency (Kṛṣṇa) and after the ominous signs having been witnessed in the Yajñasāla of the Kauravas.

There is a group of the nobles in the Kauravas' camp which stands for moral integrity and righteousness but is often dumb mainly because of financial obligations. Bhīṣma, Droṇācārya and Kṛpācārya felt that the Pāṇḍavas are just but they fail to favour them openly because they are obliged to the Kauravas for the livelihood. Bhīṣma clearly tells Yudhiṣṭhira that man is the slave of wealth, whereas wealth is no one's slave and that he himself is bound by the Kauravas' wealth. He feels helplessness caused by this obligation and asks to be excused for his stand. Droṇa and Kṛpa also, although willing to help Yudhiṣṭhira in his righteous cause, fail to extend their support because of the financial obligation only and express their inability. They admit their impotence as well.

We can find three figures in the Mahābhārata who don't appear to feel moral dilemma, but at different levels. They are Duryodhana, Karṇa and Kṛṣṇa. Duryodhana does not feel the dilemma because he is blinded by greed for possession and hatred against the Pāṇḍavas. He can neither listen to Vidura nor negotiate with Kṛṣṇa for a peaceful living. His close associate Karṇa also does not feel the moral crisis. It is mainly because Karṇa has been provided a social honour and a state to rule by Duryodhana. His chivalrous character creates an integrity in his behaviour almost unsurpassed. When Kuntī, his mother, requests him to stay away from the battle against the Pāṇḍavas, he tells her that he is helpless to obey her as people will know him to be disloyal if he dissociates from Duryodhana. He, however, promises her not to kill the Pāṇḍaves except Arjuna.

Karṇa, further, defends the action of Duryodhana to disgrace Draupadī in the assembly after Yudhiṣṭhira loses the game (dice). He tells Draupadī that since her husband has lost in the gambling, he (Yudhiṣṭhira) is a slave as per the conditions of the game and the slave, disciple (or the son) and wife are always dependent. Being the wife of a slave she does not have the right of independent voice in the assembly, hence she should go to the inner apartments of the Kauravas' palace and act like a maid-servant. He also rebukes Vikarṇa, brother of Duryodhana, who pleads for Draupadī in the court, and tells him that since this woman has got five husbands, she is like a prostitute and one should not mind if she is being dishonoured in the

court. Bhīmasena, at this point, rightly says that Kārṇa is speaking as any slave should in tune with the dāsa-dharma. Kārṇa does not mind these words. He, however, grudges the independence of Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Vidura in the assembly, who, according to social norms, should have been more loyal and indebted to the Kauravas since they are economically dependent on the Kauravas.

The strong chivalrous character of Kārṇa makes him jealous of Bhīṣma as well as Arjuna. He clearly tells Duryodhana that he would not take part in the war as long as the command of the Kauravas' army remains in the hands of the old General. He is jealous of Arjuna because of Draupadi. He was not allowed to participate in the arrow-shooting arranged for the svayamvara (self-election/selection of the husband by the bride) of Draupadi and in which Arjuna could succeed in getting the hands of the princess. He denounces Arjuna when the latter does not allow break in fighting when the wheel of his chariot got stuck in the mud. In brief, Kārṇa maintains his loyalty to the Kauravas and remains consistent in his behaviour.

Sri Kṛṣṇa, being the God-incarnate, also usually does not feel the moral crisis. He is clear about his stand and constantly supports the cause of the Pāṇdavas. He argues with his brother Balarāma and justifies a war to re-establish the Pāṇdavas. In his discussions with Sanjaya, the envoy of King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, he states that as the last resort to recover higher values even war is not immoral. He stresses the need of subscribing to the maintenance of social order (loka-saṁgraha) for the good of the totality. He reminds the ambassador of the ill-treatment given to Draupadi in the assembly by the Kauravas. He, of course, is for a compromise between the two sides and tells Sanjaya that the Kauravas and the Pāṇdavas are like the forest and the tigers who should protect each other. However, when all the efforts to reach an honourable settlement fail, he asks Yudhiṣṭhira to fight. For the just cause of restoring righteousness he persuades Arjuna as well when the arch-warrior felt disgusted at the sight of his close ones arrayed to fight against one another. He goes to the extent of breaking his promise of not taking arms against the Kauravas in the battlefield when Bhīṣma was about to over-power the Pāṇdavas. He assures Yudhiṣṭhira that if Arjuna does not kill Bhīṣma, he himself will kill the son of Gaṅgā. But in all circumstances he keeps the promise of a higher order, namely, of maintaining the moral order in the society in order to protect the values, virtues and saintly qualities in man.

The character of Devavrata, son of King Śāntanu from Gaṅgā, when taken in its entire perspective, presents a unique example of moral integrity and dilemma. Devavrata, one of the eight Vasus in his earlier life, becomes Bhīṣma because of his vow of life-long celibacy to the boatman for the sake of his father's inclination to marry Satyawatī. He also foregoes the right of succession to the throne and promises the fisherman, the father of Satyawatī, that the child born of his step-mother Satyawatī shall be the heir of the kingdom of Hastināpura. Satyawatī recognises him as righteousness embodied in the family of the Kauravas. He is

supposed to be the manifestation of truth and the highest standard of morality. Lord Kṛṣṇa is also confident of his truthfulness. When the Pāṇdavas are perplexed due to the furious assaults of Bhīṣma in the battlefield, Kṛṣṇa reminds Yudhiṣṭhira to go to grandsire and ask for the secret as to how he could be killed. And Bhīṣma does tell Yudhiṣṭhira the secret of his death.

True to his vow, Bhīṣma does not allow any concession to celibacy. When Satyawati herself requests him to help in the *niyoga* (intercourse with a woman to beget a child) with the widows of his step-brother Vicitravīrya, he bluntly refuses to do so and says that he cannot break the vow since it was a precondition to her marriage with his father. In a long statement in the epic he tells her that he would not give up truth even if the earth quits fragrance, fire its form, sun its heat and moon her coolness, etc. Even the kingdom of the three worlds is meaningless to him if compared to truth. His determination is like Naciketa's of the *Katha Upaniṣad* when the child does not accept any other boon from Yama except the knowledge of the secrets of the Self.

Bhīṣma never violates the accepted codes of the battle. He accepts the norms prescribed in the context, as stated by Kāpavya, that ladies, cowards, children, ascetics and the reluctant ones in the fight should not be killed. He also knows that women should not be married forcibly. He, further, knows that no one, except Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, can kill him in the battlefield if he is ready with arms. Therefore he tells Yudhiṣṭhira that he can be killed by Arjuna if Śikhaṇḍin (princess Ambā in her previous birth) is kept in front of Arjuna's chariot. He tells Yudhiṣṭhira and Duryodhana alike that Śikhaṇḍin was a woman in the previous birth and he will not kill her even if he has to give up his life. He also does not face Śrī Kṛṣṇa when the latter comes forward, without arms (with the wheel of the chariot) to confront him in the battlefield. He rather welcomes the Lord and wishes to be killed by Him for that would give him the highest position, namely, salvation.

Bhīṣma confronts a moral dilemma when he forcibly captures the three daughters of the king of Kāśhī in their *svayamvara* for his step-brothers. He takes away all the three sisters because he was ridiculed by the princes assembled in the court and also because he was laughed at by the princesses for his old age. When he brings the three sisters (Ambā, Ambikā and Ambālikā) to the capital and arranges their marriage with Vicitravīrya, the eldest one Ambā, refuses to do so. Ambā insists on marrying Bhīṣma himself as it was he who abducted her from the court of her father. She makes an appeal to his righteousness and asks him to act in accordance with the code of conduct in the context. Bhīṣma gets utterly confused for some time. He tells her about the vow of his celibacy and requests her to marry his brother. Ambā, obviously, does not agree to do so. Bhīṣma, then decides to send her to Shalva, the king of Saubha. It may be noted here that Shalva was already in love with Ambā. Ambā, on her part, also had developed some attraction towards Shalva with the consent of her father. Hence Salva had resisted Bhīṣma when the latter was taking the three sisters to Hastināpur. But he was humbled by Bhīṣma in the

confrontation and his life was spared by Bhīṣma at the instance of Ambā. Now Śalva declines to marry Ambā as he still fears the wrath of Bhīṣma. He tells her to go back to Bhīṣma. Back in Hastināpura, Ambā requests Bhīṣma again to oblige her but of no avail. Consequently, she curses Bhīṣma and approaches Parasurama, the teacher of Bhīṣma, for help. Paraśurāma also failed to persuade his disciple to marry Ambā. He fought a fierce duel with Bhīṣma but without any positive result. Due to utter frustration and extreme hatred, Ambā embraced death to be born again as Śikhaṇḍin for revenging upon him. She is born as the daughter of King Drupada and subsequently changes her sex to become Śikhaṇḍin and one of the commanders of the Pāṇḍavas' forces.

Bhīṣma knows very well that the Pāṇḍavas are righteous. He blesses Yudhiṣṭhira to become victorious when the latter approaches the grand-father before the break of the war. He tells Yudhiṣṭhira about his obligation towards Duryodhana due to economic dependence. But when Duryodhana charges him of being lenient towards the Pāṇḍavas in the battle-field, he clearly tells him that the Pāṇḍavas are invincible. And yet he promises him to do his best in spite of the old age. He announces that next day he would not spare any one in the battle-field except Śikhaṇḍin. Because of his furious assaults next day, the Pāṇḍavas felt perplexed and decided to place Śikhaṇḍin in front of Arjuna's chariot. This was the tenth day of the war. Now Arjuna started shooting arrows on Bhīṣma keeping Śikhaṇḍin in front. The old general, true to his words, kept his arms aside as he had decided not to kill a woman. He had learnt from the knowers of the moral codes that women are not to be killed. When his body is pierced by the arrows, he tries to take them out one by one and identifies most of them as those of Arjuna and not of Śikhaṇḍin. Submerged in grief he repeats this statement ten times. The great warrior is helpless. He cannot defend himself against the assaults from Arjuna because he can not make Arjuna his target as Śikhaṇḍin was placed in front of Arjuna's chariot. He bears the attacks without retaliation.

The helplessness of Bhīṣma is more acute in an earlier situation when Draupadī is being disgraced in the assembly of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. He, along with Droṇa, Kripa and few others, known for their wisdom and the sense of judgment, is unable to restrain Duryodhana from sending Pratikāmin, followed by Duḥśāsana, to bring Draupadī in the assembly. Draupadī wanted to know whether Yudhiṣṭhira first lost her or himself. She, of course, on her part, realizes that joy and suffering inflict everyone and, in suffering especially, moral integrity (dharma) is of utmost value. She tells the assembly that she will do whatever she is asked to, if she is told, after due considerations, whether she has been won or not. Karṇa, Śakunī and the Kauravas (except Vikarṇa), obviously, were not touched by her appeal. But Vikarṇa is astonished as to why elders like Bhīṣma and Dhṛtarāṣṭra are reticent and why the great adviser like Vidura is holding his tongue. Karṇa, as expected, retorts and asks him to keep mum when seniors are present in the court. He also tries to establish the propriety of Duryodhana's decision, as noted above.

Bhīmasena, meanwhile, gets perturbed over the affair and tries to retaliate. But

he soon realizes, like other Pāṇḍavas, that he is bound by a specific code of conduct in the context (dharma-pāsa). He feels helpless and resorts to silence.

But the dharma-pāsa is extremely perturbing for Bhīṣma, as he is supposed to be the custodian of righteousness in the Kauravas's court. He tells Draupadī that the wife must obey her husband but the husband does not have the right to stake his wife. He confesses that due to the subtle nature of dharma and the importance of the issues involved in her question he is unable to give a proper reply to her. He also tells her that Yudhiṣṭhira can give up the entire world but not the truth and since he has already admitted that he is won, the question cannot be answered properly. It is important to note at this juncture that Vidura clearly states that Draupadī was not conquered because Yudhiṣṭhira had no right to bet her having lost himself to Śakunī. But Bhīṣma is not so clear about the matter and tells Draupadī that Śakunī is unsurpassed in gambling and Yudhiṣṭhira has been won by him in the game. Since Yudhiṣṭhira does not treat his defeat as an act of cheating, he (Bhīṣma) is unable to answer the question adequately.

Bhīṣma ultimately resorts to the subtle nature of dharma. He tells Draupadī that the course of morality is very subtle. Even the illustrious wise in the world are unable to understand it. He states that what in this world a strong man calls morality is regarded to be so by others, howsoever otherwise it may really be. But about one point he is very sure and tells Draupadī that the destruction of the Kaurava's race is imminent because the Kauravas have become the slaves of covetousness and folly, and covetousness is treated to be a great dragon and source of sin. He, further, praises the strong moral integrity of Draupadī and also points out that the elders like Droṇa and others, who, although conversant with moral codes, sit with their heads downwards like dead (due to moral dilemma).

Realising his own intricate position and the inability to answer the questions of the blessed lady, and in all earnestness, Bhīṣma turns her to Yudhiṣṭhira whom he treats to be the authority on the question. Yudhiṣṭhira could not speak at this moment. Arjuna, however, admits that Yudhiṣṭhira had full authority to put his brothers and wife on stake before he lost himself. But the fact was otherwise. He had lost himself first.

The ugly finale in the assembly, as noted earlier, is averted due to the miraculous extension of Draupadī's saṛee and the ominous cries of dogs and jackals near the yajñasala which induced Dhṛtarāṣṭra to let her and the Pāṇḍavas be free but to be trapped again by Duryodhana and Śakunī in dice resulting in their thirteen years' exile before the great war broke out.

The moral dilemma of Bhīṣma is over when he decides not to fight against Śikhāṇḍin and thus, although indirectly, allows Arjuna to attack him unresisted. He opts for his death during uttarayana (when the sun moves northward from the tropic of Capricorn), since he is gifted with the power to control his death and to leave the physical body as and when he desires. He lies down on the bed of arrows for fifty-

eight days. At the instance of Lord Kṛṣṇa he teaches Yudhiṣṭhira (and all others present there) the code of conduct in different walks of life including moral crisis (see Śānti and Anuśāna parvas of the epic). The long discourse covers almost the entire realm of individual and social life. It is unique in the history of human thought.

Since Dhṛtarāṣṭra was also present when Bhīṣma was preaching while preparing for his death, Bhīṣma requests him to look after the Pāṇḍavas as his own sons since they tread on the path of righteousness. The grand old man left this world in absolute peace and harmony. To some extent his death can be compared with Socrates and Jesus who also died in perfect peace leaving great impact on the life and thinking of human beings. In the Indian tradition the name of Bhīṣma is recorded as the synonym of truthfulness and moral integrity.

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2. Nārāyaṇam namaskṛtya naram caiva narottamam, Devīm Sarasvatīm caiva tato Jayamudirayet. Invocation.
3. Yato dharmastato jayah. Mahābhārata, Bhīṣma Parvan, 2.14//
4. Ibid., 77.8; 85.43//
5. Yato dharmastataḥ Kṛṣṇo yataḥ Kṛṣṇastato jayah, Ibid., 41.55//
6. sa eva rājā dharmātmā śasvato stu Yudhiṣṭhirah, Udyoga, 139.23//
7. arthasāstramidam proktam dharmasāstramidam mahat, kāmasāstramidam proktam Vyasanā mita buddhinā. (?)
8. urdhvabāhurviromyesa na ca kascicchrṇoti me, dharmādarthasca kāmśca sa kimartam na sevyate, Svargarohana, 5.49//
9. nādaṇḍaḥ Kṣatriyo bhāti nādaṇḍo bhūtimasṇute, nādaṇḍasya prajā rājñah sukhamedhanti Bhārata; Sabhā, 14.14//
10. The Bhagavadgītā, 1.28-46.
11. Vanam yāsyāmi durdharsa śreyo me tatra vaigatam, na yuddham rocate Kṛṣṇa hanti Bhīṣmo hi naḥ sadā, Bhīṣma, 103.19
12. Sabhā, 63.27-36//
13. arthasya puruṣo dāso dāsaṣṭvartho na kasyacit iti satyam Mahārāja baddho smyarthena Kauravaiḥ, Bhīṣma, 41.36//
14. atastvam klībavad vākyaṁ bravīmi Kurunandana hr̥to smyarthena Kauravya yuddhādanya-tkimicchasi, Ibid, 41.37//
15. Ibid., 41.51, 52 and 66//

16. na hi saksyāmahaṁ tyaktum nrpaṁ Duryodhanam raṇe anāryam ca nṛsaṁsāṁ ca kṛitag-
hnam ca hi me bhavet, *Sānti*, 1.28//
17. vadhyānvisahyānsaṅgrāme na hanisyāmi te sutaṁ, Yudhiṣṭhiram ca Bhīmaṁ ca yamau cavar-
junādṛte, *Udyoga*, 144.20//
18. trayah kileme adhanā bhavānti dāsah sisyaścāsvatantrā ca nārī dāsasya patnī tvam dhana-
masya bhadro hinesvarā dāsadhanam ca dāsi; *Sabha*, 61.1//
19. pravīṣya sa nah paricārairbhajasva tatte kāryam sistamāveṣma vesma, Iśah sma sarve tava
rājaputrī bhavantu te Dhārtrāstrā na Pārthah, *Ibid.*, 61.2//
20. *Ibid.*, 61.36//
21. *Ibid.*, 66.62//
22. *Karna*, 66.62//
23. *Udyoga*, 1.10-24//
24. *Ibid.*, 29.1-51//
25. vanam rājā Dhṛtarāṣṭrah saputro vyāghrā vane Saṁjaya pāṇḍaveyā mā vanam chindi savyā-
ghram mā vyāghranninaso vanāt, *Udyoga*, 29.4
nirvano badhyate vyāghro nirvyāghram chindyate vanam tasmādvvyāghro vanam rakṣedvanam
vyāghram ca pālayet, *Ibid.*, 29.48//
26. *Bhīṣma*, 55.86-92; 102.37-58//
27. *Ibid.*, 55.82-85; 103.29-35//
28. paritrāṇāya sādhuṇaṁ vināśāya ca duṣkṛitām dharmasaṁsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge
yuge, *Gītā*, 4.8//
29. adya prabhṛti me dāsa brahmacāryam bhaviṣyati, *Ādi*, 94.88//
30. yo' syām janayīṣyate putra sa no rāja bhaviṣyati, *Ibid.*, 94.79//
31. tvameva naḥ kule dharmastvam satyam tvam parā gatih, *Ibid.*, 99.5//
32. gamyatām sa vadhopāyam praṣṭum sāgaragā sutaḥ vaktumarhati satyam sa tvayā prṣṭo
viśeṣataḥ *Bhīṣma*, 103.51//
33. *Ādi*, 97.13-18//
34. parityajeyam trailokyam rājyam deveṣu vā punah yadvāpyadhikata metābhyam na tu satyam
kathancaṇa, *Ādi*, 97.15//
35. mā vadhīṣtvam striyam bhīruṁ mā sisum mā tapasvinām nā' yudhyamāno hantavyo na ca
grāhya balāt striyaḥ *Sānti*, 133.13
36. na tam paśyami lokesu yo mam hanyatsamudyatam rte Kṛṣṇanmahābhāgat Pāṇḍavādva
Dhananjayāt, *Bhīṣma*, 103.80
37. *Ibid.*, 103.77//

38. Ibid., 94.16-17; 108.18//
39. Ibid., 102.60-61//
40. cintāmahyagamadviro yuktam tasyaiva karnaṇaḥ, *Adi*, 96.50//
41. mayā Saubhapatih pūrvam manasābhivṛtaḥ patih, tena cāsmi vṛta pūrvameṣa kāmāśca me pituh, *Ibid.*, 96.48//
42. gaccha gaccheti tām Sāvah punah punarabhāsata vibhemi Bhīsmātsusroṇi tvam ca Bhīsmā-parigrahaḥ, *Udyoga*, 172.22
43. Ibid., 41.36//
44. prītoṣmi putra yuddhasva jayamāpnuhi Paṇḍava, *Bhīma*, 41.34//
45. Ibid., 41.36//
46. yattu śakyam mayā kartum vṛddhenādyā nṛpottama kariṣyāmi yathāśaktim prekṣedanīm sabāṇḍhavaḥ, *Ibid.*, 54.41//
47. Ibid., 108.18//
48. Arjunasya ime vāṇāḥ ne me vāṇāḥ Śikhaṇḍinaḥ, mama prāṇārujanti ne me vāṇāḥ Śikhaṇḍinaḥ, *Ibid.*, 114.55-60//
49. kim nu pūrvam parajaiśīratmānam mām nu Bhārata, *Sabha*, 60.7//
50. evam nūnam vyadadhatsanvidhātā sparsāvubhau sprsato dhīra bālau, dharmam tvekāṁ paramam prāha loka sa naḥ samam dhāsyati gopyamānaḥ, *Ibid.*, 70.13//
51. Sāmbhūya sarveśca jito'pi yasmātpascādayam kaitavamabhyupetaḥ samikṣya sarve mama cā'pi vākyam vibrūta me prasnamidaṁ—yathāvat, *Ibid.*, 61.44//
jitaṁ vāpyajitaṁ va' pi manyadhvam vā yathā nṛpaḥ tathā prayuktamicchāmi tatkarīṣyāmi Kauravaḥ, *Ibid.*, 62.13//
52. Bhīsmāśca Dhṛtarāṣṭraśca Kuruvṛddhatamāvubhau sametya nāhatuḥ kiñcidviduraśca mahāmatih, *Ibid.*, 61.13//
53. dharmapāśasitaśteyam nādhigacchāmi saṅkātāṁ gauraveṇa niruddhasca nigrabādarjunasya ca, *Ibid.*, 62.36//
54. asvo hyasaktaḥ paṇitum parāsvam, striasya bharturvasatam samikṣya, *Ibid.*, 60.40//
55. na vivektum ca te prasnametaṁ śaknōmi niscayāt. sukṣmatvādgahanatvācca kāryasyasya ca gauravat, *Ibid.*, 62.16//
56. tyajeta sarvam pṛthivīm samṛddhām Yudhiṣṭhiraḥ satyamathona jahyāt. uktam jito' smṛiti ca Pāṇḍavena tasmānna śaknōmi vivektumetat, *Ibid.*, 61.41//
56. —A. *Ibid.*, 59.4//
57. *Ibid.*, 60.42/1
58. Uktavānasmī kaiyāṇi dharmasya ca parām gatim, loka na śakyate gantumapi viprairmahātmabhiḥ, *Ibid.*, 62.14//

59. balavānstu tathā dharmam loke pasyati pūruṣha, sa dharmo dharma-velāyām bhavatyabhihitah paraih, *Ibid.*, 62.15//
60. nūnamantah kulasyāsyā bhavita na cirādiva, tathā hi Kuravaḥ sarve lobhamohaparāyaṇaḥ, *Ibid.*, 62.17//
61. eko lobho mahāgrāho lobhātpāpam pravarttate, *Śānti*, 152.2//
62. kuleṣu jātā Kalyāṇi vyaśanābhyāhataḥ bhr̥ṣam, dharmānmārgārṇa cyavante yathā nastvam-vadhuh sthitā, *Sabhā*—62.18//
63. ete Dronādayascaiva vṛddhā dharmavido janāḥ. sūnyaiḥ sariraistesthanti gatāsava evānataḥ, *Ibid.*, 62.20//
64. Yudhiṣṭhirastu prasne' sminpramāṇamiti mo matib, ajitām vā jitām vāpi svayam vyāhar-tumarhati, *Ibid.*, 62.21//
65. *Ibid.*, 63.27-36//
66. svacchaṁ lamaranam tasmai dadau tuṣṭah pitā svayam, *Adi*, 94.94//
67. *Anuśāsana Parva*, 153.33-34//

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BIDUR

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In the Mahabharata Bidur's character shines like the Pole Star, mellow, but clearly visible. The Pole Star continues to remain steadfast in its position, providing right direction to those sailing in an uncharted sea. So does Bidur. Quiet yet forceful, non-assertive yet exercising great moral influence on the course of events in which the participants are the principal characters of the epic. In short, Bidur is the symbol of truth, virtue and righteousness. Vedavyasa himself has eulogised Bidur's wisdom, Gandhari's religiosity, and patience of Kunti :

“Bistarān Kurubasya Gandharyā dharmashilātā
Khattu Prajñā dhṛitī Kuntya samyag Daipānābrabit.”

(Adiparva : 1/99)

Bidur was Krishna Daipayana's son born of a maid servant under a strange circumstance. He was thus a 'khetraja' son and youngest of the four brothers, Bhishma, Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Bidur. When he was conceived, the great sage had praised Bidur's mother in the following verse :

“Ayānch tē sūvé garvā sreyānūdharmagatā,
Dharmatma bhābita lokē sarvabuddhimatāu barā.”

(Adiparva : 106/27)

“Blessed one, the noblest man who has come into your womb will be the most intelligent and righteous person in the world.” The prediction turned out to be true in every respect. Righteous, talented, enlightened, possessed with perceptive ability and mentally composed—this was how the great Rishi had introduced Bidur among the principal characters of the epic. Bhishma reared Bidur as his son and made adequate provision for his education and training. He became not only well versed in history, ethics and scriptures, but also an adept in the art of warfare. Despite all achievements, he had no claims to the Kaurava kingdom because of his birth from a sudra mother and brahmin father. This misfortune did not have any adverse effect on his outlook and character, because he was deeply rooted in the perennial values of life which were basically ethical.

Bidur has been introduced for the first time as Dhritarashtra's amatya—Dhritarashtra's principal adviser. He, therefore, enjoyed a position of great prestige in the hierarchy of ministers. His advice to Dhritarashtra was always based on truth and justice. Never for once did he deviate from his ethical standpoint. These we find at the very outset when Duryodhana was born. At the time of his birth ominous and evil signs were seen in nature, for example, the howling of jackals. This gave Bidur the foresight that Kuru family would be destroyed due to the evil deeds of this son of Dhritarashtra. This impelled him to give the most unpalatable advice to him.

He advised the king to disown Duryodhana to save his kingdom from ruin and destruction. His pronouncement in this regard is worth quoting :

“Tyajdekam kulasyarthé gramasharthé tyajet
Gramam janapadsyarthé atmarthé Prithvimtyajet.”

That is, “in order to save the family, the individual should be given up. In order to save the village, the family may have to be given up. For the well being of the city, the village may be given up, if so needed. For protecting oneself, if one has to give up his country, it is desirable to do so.” Needless to say, his wise counsel went unheeded because of Dhritarastra’s blind love for his son. Notwithstanding his weakness, Dhritarastra fully appreciated the moral wisdom of Bidur and would assign to the latter works of great responsibility. On some occasions he would not even hesitate to accept Bidur’s advice even if this went against his son Duryodhana. For example, when Duryodhana planned to engage Yudhishthira in a dice-throwing gamble, Dhritarastra had advised him against it only because Bidur did not approve of the same. As expected, Duryodhana could not tolerate him because the latter’s advice always clashed with his self-interest. Once being enraged, Bidur told Duryodhana that he could not be his flatterer and if he thought that the minister would support all his actions, he should rather engage a woman, an imbecile and invalid as his minister.

Right from the beginning, Bidur opposed the dice-playing gamble as he had sensed the dangers involved. But under Dhritarastra’s orders he had to go to Indraprastha to bring Yudhishthira to the scene. Yudhishthira had realised that no intelligent person should participate in it, yet he sought Bidur’s opinion. Rightly did Bidur say that all evils originated from it and despite his clear stand against it, Dhritarastra had sent him to Yudhishthira. In the circumstance, Yudhishthira should do what he thought to be good. He knew that the play was treacherous, sinful and immoral and it did not give an opportunity to Kshatriya to show his prowess, but he succumbed to it out of his respect for Dhritarastra. This was a reflection on his character in as much as he was unable to face the truth fearlessly. Consequences of the game were too well known to be repeated. Yudhishthira was loosing every time and ultimately due to the machinations of Shakuni, he decided to use Draupadi as pawn in the game as he had nothing else left to do so. At this decision, the elderly persons in the audience like Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, etc., showed great resentment and some also shed tears. Bidur was also present and he sat with his head down in shame. But so great was his anger that he breathed fiercely like a venomous snake. This time also, Yudhishthira lost the game and as a consequence, Draupadi was humiliated in the presence of all including the elders but none uttered a word of protest. But Bidur could not tolerate the ignominy of Draupadi and raising the voice said that the humiliation to which Draupadi was subjected was nothing but a great slur on **dharma**. It was he alone who could not be a passive spectator as he perceived Draupadi’s disgrace as disgrace of **dharma**.

Having lost in the dice throwing game, Yudhisthira along with his brothers had to go out to live in the forest as a consequence of his defeat. When they were leaving, portentous signs like lightening, untimely solar eclipse, etc. were noticed to occur in the Kuru kingdom. Getting unnerved, Dhritarastra who never before took seriously Bidur's advice, could not do so this time and implored Bidur to do all that he could for the good of the Kauravas and Pandavas. Addressing him, Dhritarastra said, "You have unsullied wisdom of Sukracharya, knowledge of the subtleties of religious tenets, and above all, you are impartial observer—*samdarshi*". Realising that his subjects had revolted at the dishonesty undertaken in the dice game and for forcing the Pandava brothers to go to the forest, Dhritarastra had apprehension of the loss of his kingdom. Sensing this, Bidur told him, "Maharaj, *dharma*, *artha* and *kama*—of these three duties, *Dharma* is of prime importance because it is *dharma* which lies at the root of sovereignty. Sinful persons like Duryodhana, Sakuni and others have destroyed it by their acts of dishonesty. The only way you can atone for all this is to call back the Pandavas and return half of their share in the kingdom and remain contented with the other half of your own share. Do not greed over other's wealth. Oh king, if Duryodhana does not listen to you, do not hesitate to punish by disowning him. I had advised you earlier also, but you did not have the courage to do so. If you do not do so now, you will repent later. Instal Yudhisthira on the throne and everything will come under control once he becomes the king". At this Dhritarastra became annoyed and left the scene. Dhritarastra's attitude to Bidur was ambivalent—a composite attitude of like and dislike. He knew of Bidur's innate integrity of character which would never compromise with falsehood and this drew him towards Bidur. But he drew himself away when Bidur chastised him for his weakness, self-interest and greed. Dhritarastra was often bitten by his conscience whenever he supported the unjust doings of his sons. His greed and blind love for them prevented him from siding with justice. He did realise inwardly that the Pandavas had rightful claims for half of the Kuru kingdom but his covetousness did not allow him to act on his realization. At the same time, he was coward and afraid of a warfare on this issue. To overcome his inner conflict, he took recourse to subterfuges. His dislike for Bidur came to light when he compared his behaviour with that of an unfaithful wife. In contrast, Yudhisthira's reverence for Bidur for latter's high moral personality is well expressed in the following verse of Udyog parva :

Sa ebā bhukta sa guru sa vartā
 sā bai pitā sa eba mātā suhrichhā
 Agadhabuddhirbiduro dirghadarshi
 sa no mantri kusalan tasya prichhé.

He is a devotee, he is our guru, our master; possessed with deep intellect and foresighted, he is our counsellor, ask him about his welfare.

These were addressed to Sanjoy by Yudhisthira when the latter had asked him to visit Hastinapur and persuade Dhritarastra to part with a number of villages in lieu of war. When Dhritarastra refused to agree to the proposals of Sanjoy, the latter admonished him severely. He did not hesitate to warn him that this immoral act of

his would destroy the Kuru family in the same manner as fire destroys dry hay. Not only that, he chastised Dhritarastra by saying that he had fallen in the clutches of untrustworthy persons and had abandoned his trusted friends. This admonishment profoundly disturbed his mental peace and compelled him to approach Bidur for latter's counsel. Bidur's words at Dhritarastra's predicament have brought out in clear manner the moral fabric of his character. He made no bones about Dhritarastra's blatantly immoral and, therefore, unjustified conduct by telling him that although he was well-versed in the scriptures, he was totally unfit to rule over the Kaurava kingdom. Anguished, he implored Dhritarastra to return their father's land to the Pandavas and thereby earn happiness and his lost reputation. He added that man lives as long as memories of his good actions remained fresh in people's minds. The moral lessons given by Bidur to Dhritarastra were not only appropriate to the occasion but also contained universal value and significance so much so that these have come down to posterity as **Bidur-niti**-moral codes for guidance of conduct and have influenced the later ethical codifications. Another important example of Bidur's moral wisdom is revealed in his dialogue with Krishna when the latter came to Dhritarastra as a mediator for peace to impress upon him about the utter futility of war and therefore to do what justice demanded. As expected Krishna was received with due respect by Dhritarastra and was offered hospitality. But the former respectfully declined it and stayed with Bidur on this occasion. Kunti Devi also had spoken highly of Bidur's moral stand to Krishna. "Oh Krishna, character is the ornament of that highly intelligent, reserved and great soul—Bidur."

As it is not possible to narrate in a short article the different scenes of Bidur's interaction which bring to light his innate integrity, keen sense of justice and perceptiveness, we shall now turn to the last phase of his life. The Kurukshetra battle had ended and we find Dhritarastra immersed in grief at the loss of his one hundred sons. Though Bidur had foreseen this tragedy and had warned Dhritarastra many a time to forsake the path of injustice based on lust of wealth and power, Dhritarastra did not heed his counsel. Instead of cursing him for his sins, Bidur stood by his side at this sorrowful hour and consoled him in different ways. At one time, he referred to the temporariness of life, at another, he spoke of the inevitability of happenings as predetermined by destiny, as if a yogi enlightened by his yogic realization was giving his precepts from the Bhagavat Gita. In all these, nowhere was any trace of rudeness. Every word that he spoke exuded warm sympathy. It is for this divine quality that Bidur had earned everybody's reverence.

At the behest of Dhritarastra Bidur left for the cremation ground that was Kurukshetra taking with him bewailing Gandhari and other females. His sorrow at the wanton loss of lives was more intense than that of the mourning women but there was no trace of it in his outward behaviour. The significance of nector-like words that he used to console Dhritarastra, lying on the ground with sorrow, is timeless and will continue to give solace to any man with similar state of mind. He addressed Dhritarastra saying, "King, do not lie on the ground, arise and restore your

self-confidence. Great king, death is the ultimate end of beings. All accumulation ends in erosion. Rise and fall follow each other inevitably. Those who are dead were not seen before their birth, so are they invisible now after their death. Then why do you mourn? Those great souls were courageous Kshatriyas. Death in battle has been a blessing to them. You should not, therefore, mourn their loss. In life cycle, thousands and thousands of mothers, fathers, wives and sons become related. But is there any permanent relation of ours with them or their with us? In order to overcome sorrow, do not brood over its cause. It does not decrease sorrow, rather increases it many times more". Dhritarastra had experienced courage to sustain his loss and got back his mental peace from Bidur's saying.

Bidur was a yogi inwardly and a worldly man outwardly. Both these aspects were harmoniously blended in his personality. In his dealings with the affairs of the Kauravas and Pandavas, he was non-attached and motivated only by truth and justice. That he was a yogi is borne out by the fact that he left Hastinapur along with Dhritarastra, Gandhari, Kunti and Sanjoy to live the life of a hermit in the Ashrama of Rajarshi Shatayupa. He wore bark of tree and became much reduced physically by his meditative life. When the Pandavas visited the Ashrama, they enquired about Bidur as the latter could not be seen. Dhritarastra replied, "my sons, Bidur is in deep meditation and has given up, taking food and has been maintaining himself only on air as his food. His body has become almost a skeleton thereby." Searching for him, Yudhishthira found Bidur in the deep forest, naked, unkempt and his body full of dust. Bidur was standing against a tree with his eyes fixed on Yudhishthira. With his vision mingled with that of Yudhishthira, he entered the body of the latter through yogic power. Outwardly there was no change. Bidur's lifeless body remained reclined against the tree in the same manner in which he was seen by Yudhishthira. According to an erudite scholar² of Mahabharata, Bidur's entering the body of Yudhishthira is significant. Yudhishthira was famous as the son of **Dharma**, Bidur also had his origin from **Dharma**. Perhaps this is the reason that the two manifestations of **Dharma** merged into each other.

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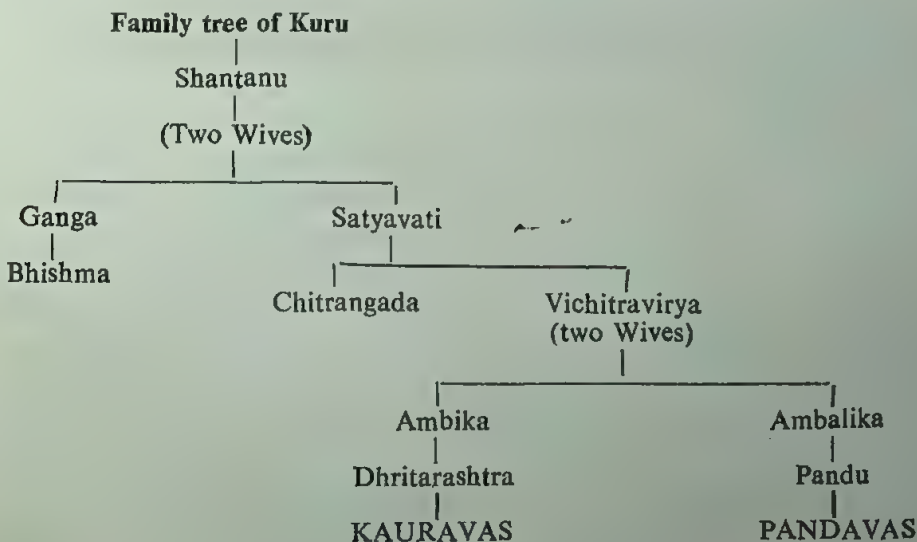
DHRITARASHTRA

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In view of the depth of the knowledge of fundamental reality in the chain of the development of Vedic ideology, Mahabharata is a great epic of Indian wisdom. Its period is supposed to be 3,000. B.C. Lokmanya Tilak considers the period of Vedas as 4500 B. C. During this period, no mention of Mahabharata is found. From this, it is clear that the incidence of Kurukshetra is of post-Vedic period. The story of Mahabharata is not of one mind in a particular period but it is of many minds in different times. At the time of *nag-yajña* by Janmejaya it consisted of twentyfour thousand verses but gradually many verses were added to it and it took the form of a large book consisting of one lac verses. It lacks the consistency of the Ramayana. Mahabharata is not a mythology. It lacks the sweetness, love, devotion and affection of Puranas and Upanishads. Its end is in sorrows, a song of mourn, in which Dhritarashtra, Yudhishthira, Gandhari, Kunti all cry together. Gandhari, on getting information of the killing of her one hundred sons, breaks into heartrending grief. Her emotions of grief turn into anger and she curses Krishna that his relatives will also meet the same end in fighting amongst themselves like Kauravas and Pandavas.

Mahabharata is a great epic depicting the conflict of two sides of life : brightness and darkness. On the one hand, it deals with religion, ethics and conduct and on the other hand, it depicts the picture of destruction resulting from greed, pride, jealousy, anger, hatred and sorrow which in time are born of human weaknesses.



King Dhritarashtra of the Kuru clan was born to Vichitravirya. His mother's name was Ambika. The sons of Dhritarashtra were called Kauravas. A story is related to the birth of Kauravas. Gandhari, the daughter of king Subal, had the blessings of God Shankara to have one hundred sons. Gandhari became pregnant after her marriage with Dhritarashtra. She carried her pregnancy for two years. One day, she attacked her pregnant stomach out of anger, consequently she gave birth to a flesh like iron-mass having one hundred embryos. All the embryos were put in earthen pots with clarified butter separately for two years. One hundred babies born after this period, were called Kauravas.

Dhritarashtra was born blind and so he could not ascend the throne under the constitution of the kingdom. "Dhritarashtrastwacha Kshatushtabda Rajyam Na Pratyapadyat". —(Adi Parva : 25)

It is said that a man blind by birth has more developed insight. Poet Surdas could see Krishna with his closed eyes. Really, source of insight is in love and affection which enlightens man. Dhritarashtra was lacking this in himself. Lust for throne was ever present in the heart of Dhritarashtra. Pandu handed over the charge of the Kingdom to Dhritarashtra before leaving for rest and prayer in the forest. Dhritarashtra gladly accepted the crown of the King. It is an explicit example of his latent ambition. His heart burnt in the fire of lust for the crown of the King.

In the flow of events of Mahabharata, the character of Dhritarashtra has been vividly depicted. Dhritarashtra, the king of Kuru clan was a fatalist.

He says :

Anishwaro ayam purusho bhavābhava
Sūtraprotā darumayeev yoshā
Dhātrā tum dishtasya vasho kīāyam
Tasmād vad twam shrāvane dhritoham.

—(Udyoga Parva 39/1)

That is, man has no hand in the happening or non-happening, being or non-being of a thing; everything is in the hand of fate. Brahma makes everybody dance like a puppet tied with thread.

Vidura, the statesman having religious, moral and ethical character and being the Prime Minister as well as a relative of King Dhritarashtra, did not find the quality of a great King and religious man in him (Dhritashrashtra). When Dhritarashtra allowed Duryodhana for gambling, Vidura requested him thus :

"King, your permission for gambling does not seem good to me. It will encourage enmity and rivalry among your sons. Kindly stop it." But his blind filial affection became the sole cause of war. Dhritarashtra also rejected the numerous objections raised by his wife Gandhari who epitomised chastity and said :

"May this family be destroyed, I can't check Duryodhana."

"Athāvraveen Maharajo Gāndhārīm Dharmadarshinim
Antah Kamam Kulasyastu Na Shaknomi Nivaritum" (11)

(Adi Parva—Sabha Parva)

Yudhisthira tells Sri Krishna :

“Gridho Rajā Dhritrashtra Swadharma Nanupashchati
Vasyatwat Putra Gridhitwānmand Syanveti Shāsanam.”

“Avisthalam Vriksthalam Mākandī Vārnāvatam
Avasānam Cha Govindam Kanchidevātra Panchamam
Panch Nastāt Deeyantam Grāmā Vā Nagarāni vā
Vasem Sahita Yesu Mā Cha No Bhartānshan”

—(Udyog-Parva)

Govinda, I had asked Dhritarashtra for one block of five villages you prefer; so five villages that we, five brothers, may live harmoniously and for our cause the entire Bharatvarsha may not be destroyed.

King Dhritarashtra is immersed in greed. He does not see to his duty. Being attached blindly to his sons he always follows the command of his foolish son Duryodhana :

Yudhisthira tells :

Kule Jātasya Vridhamya Per Vitteshu Gridhyatah
Lobhah Pragyānmāhanti—Pragyāhanti Hatahimam.

That is, when a man born in a high family and grown old, wants to grab the wealth of others, his reason is ruined by this greed. With the loss of reason, shame is also lost.

Sanjaya, the omniscient and gifted with divine vision and who is also a minister of Dhritarashtra, points out the latter's demerits :

Naisha Kalo Maharaj Tava Shashvat Kritagatah
Twaya Haiyevāditaḥ Pārthā Nikrito Bhartarshabha
Pitā shreshthah Suhrid Yashcha Samyak Prañihitātmayā
Astheyam Hi Hitam Tena Na Drogdhā Gururuchyate.

King, you do harm to Pandavas seated in place of their father, rather being elder you should be cordial to his dependants. Man having hatred, enmity, cannot be called Father or Guru.

Dhritarashtra lacked in generosity which is essential for the proper development of personality. His behaviour was of lower-kind. When Yudhisthira, at the instance of Shakuni, places Draupadi as a pawn on dice gamble, the entire assembly mourns. Dhritarashtra being pleased, inquires again and again : Is our side winning ?

Dhitrāshtrastu Tam Hrishtah Paryayrichhat Punah Punah
Kim Jitam Kim Jitmiti Hyākāram Nāmyarakshata (43)

(Adi Parva—Dyut Parva)

After Kurukshetra war, Yudhisthira, Dhritarashtra, Gandhari, Kunti and Draupadi paid tributes to their departed near and dear ones on the bank of the Ganges. King Yudhisthira offered Dhritarashtra the palace to live in with all kingly honour. Dhritarashtra after fifteen years got his eyes of wisdom opened by Vidura and left for northern side with his wife Gandhari. He lived three years in the forest

as a hermit and lastly was consumed to the flames of wild-fire which suddenly engulfed the forest. Sitting in a yogic posture, he took agni-Samadhi.

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In the **Bhagavad-Gita** Sri Krishna instructs Arjuna in all three paths—liberation through action without attachment; liberation through knowledge of the Self and the Absolute Ground of all being with which it is identical; liberation through intense devotion to the personal God or divine Incarnation.

Do without attachment the work you have to do; for a man who does his work without attachment attains supreme Goal verily. By action alone men like Janaka attained perfection.

Freed from passion, fear and anger, absorbed in Me, taking refuge in Me; and purified by the Knowledge, many have become one with my Being.

Those who have completely controlled their senses and are of even mind under all conditions and thus contemplate of Imperishable, the Ineffable, the Unmanifest, the omnipresent, the Incomprehensible, the Eternal—they, devoted to the welfare of all beings, attain Me alone and none else.

GANDHARI

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When after the death of Duryodhana the righteous but shaken Yudhisthira entrusts Krishna to go to Hastinapura to console Gandhari, Vasudeva addresses her by saying : "O daughter of Suvala, O you of excellent vows, hear what I say. O auspicious dame, there is no lady like you in the world."** (Shalya Parva, ch. 63) Indeed, Gandhari is the epitome of all that is noble and virtuous in human beings. She rises to the pinnacle of greatness while at the same time often exhibiting little frailties that characterise ordinary mortals. Gandhari is the essence of wisdom and foresight strong determination and sweetness of temper, forbearance and righteousness.

Daughter of Suvala, the king of Gandhara, Gandhari is a devout worshipper of Siva from her childhood. She is married to the blind Dhritarashtra after her father takes into consideration his physical prowess and noble blood. Extremely devoted to her husband Gandhari covers her own eyes with cloth throughout her life so that his physical handicap does not in any way lessen her love and respect for Dhritarashtra. She remains a model of loyalty, devotion and veneration in her conjugal life. One day when Gandhari gratifies Dwaipayana who comes hungry and exhausted, Vyasa grants her a boon that she shall have one hundred sons. She also desires a daughter so that her husband may go to "those worlds that the possession of a daughter's son confers on a man". Accordingly, Dussala is born.

When the reputation of the Pandavas spreads because of their acquisition of knowledge and martial skill, Dhritarashtra and his sons are filled with envy. To Gandhari this is unpalatable and she grieves in silence. She is afflicted with remorse when Dhritarashtra, almost always partial to his sons, summons the Pandavas to play the game of dice again. (Sabha Parva, ch. 74) She repeatedly requests Dhritarashtra to disapprove of "the wicked-minded ones who are but boys"—"Let your sons follow you as their leader. Let them not for ever be separated from you. Therefore, abandon at my word this disgrace of our race". (Sabha Parva, ch. 75) She does not hesitate to use the harshest words to describe Duryodhana and reminds sternly—"When Duryodhana was born, the high-souled khattwa (Vidura) said, 'It is better to send this disgrace of the race (Duryodhana) to the other world'." She is convinced that he will prove to be the cause of destruction of the race. She warns Dhritarashtra, "Do not err. The prosperity which is acquired by the aid of wicked acts is soon destroyed, while that which is won by honest means takes root and descends from generation to generation". (Sabha Parva, ch. 75) But these words of wisdom have little effect on her husband and sons. Destiny takes its own course.

**All the quotations are from the English translation of the original Sanskrit text of the Mahabharata, edited and published by Manmatha Nath Dutt, Calcutta 1895.

In contrast to Gandhari Dhritarashtra often wavers in his resolution. His love of children often gets the better of his sense of justice. He repeatedly tries to dissuade his wicked son—"Do not proceed with this game. Vidura does not approve of it—the wise Vidura of lofty intellect who is ever intent on our welfare. He says the game is bound to result in a fierceness of hate which will consume us and our kingdom". He counsels Duryodhana, "O son, to covet other's property is exceedingly mean. He, who is contented and is engaged in the practices of his own order, enjoys happiness. Not to try to get the wealth of others, to persevere in one's own affairs and to protect what has been earned—these are the indications of true greatness. The Pandavas are like your arms; do not chop off those arms of yours. Do not plunge yourself into internal dissensions coveting the wealth of your brothers". (Sabha Parva, ch. 54). But Duryodhana is too blinded by *adharma* to pay any heed to this advice. At this stage Dhritarashtra, unlike Gandhari, surrenders his better judgment and seems to follow the wrong path almost knowingly. Gandhari remains firm in her resolve; she has the mother's affection but for her there can be no compromise with what she looks upon as true *dharma*. Dhritarashtra often betrays a lack of courage and determination; he even sounds helpless when he wants Gandhari to persuade Duryodhana to see reason—"O Gandhari, this is your wicked-souled son who never obeys my command owing to his avarice for prosperity; he will lose prosperity as also his life". (Udyoga Parva, ch. 129). Her remarkable speech in the Udyoga Parva on the true role of a ruler and the virtues which a successful sovereign must possess reveals not only her understanding of kingship but also throws abundant light on her own mental make-up. She tells Duryodhana, "O you of great wisdom, a kingdom cannot be maintained by following the bent of your desires alone, nor can it be earned, protected or enjoyed (by that means). O best of Bharatas, nor can one, who has not controlled his senses, enjoy a kingdom for a long while; one, who has controlled his senses and has intelligence, can alone protect a kingdom. Desire and wrath snatch away a man from earthly good; after subjugating these two enemies does a king conquer the earth. The sovereignty enjoyed by a ruler of men is a great thing; a kingdom can easily be wished for by those that are of wicked souls but it cannot be suitably protected by them". (Udyoga Parva, ch. 129). She makes a final effort to make her son act in a rational manner—"My dear son, from a fight there will result no good; and how can there be happiness? Even victory is not stable; do not therefore set your mind on war". Blessed with astounding foresight as she is, Gandhari warns Duryodhana of the coming doom—"Being subject to the influence of wrath, do not, my dear son, slay the Kurus; let not this entire earth be massacred on account of your doings".

Gandhari has an unfailing courage of conviction. Distressed by the suicidal resolve of Duryodhana she accuses her husband in an outspoken manner—"Quickly summoned your son, who is afflicted with a passion for kingdom; a kingdom cannot be maintained by an unrighteous person who seeks neither virtue nor worldly good. But notwithstanding all this, Duryodhana having no humility in him, has obtained what is this, for you are fond of your son". She bluntly questions Dhritarashtra's indifference even on the verge of impending war. Not for a moment does she show any disrespect

to her husband; nor does she flinch from stating the truth, howsoever unpalatable, in order to uphold **dharma**.

Her vision of ideal relationship between **dharma** and kingship is crystal clear. She is almost invariably objective, rational and upright. The demands of truth and righteousness take her to a much higher level than that of a good mother or a wife. She never loses sight of the essential **dharma**; the gravest of crises only marginally affects her equanimity.

But she is far from being wooden and mechanical. There are situations when she reacts in a way any woman would do. Draupadi's humiliation in the Hall of Assembly cuts her to the quick not so much because it is immoral and indecent but because it is a very grave insult to the whole of womanhood. The fact that one of her sons stoops to such a level fills her with intense remorse. As an act of expiation, she implores Dhritarashtra to forsake her son. When she arrives at Kurukshetra the heart-rending scenes of death and devastation plunge Gandhari in unfathomable sorrow; the mother in her loses all self-control. She drops on the earth "like an uprooted plantain tree". Filled with anger and sorrow at the death of her sons, the agitated Gandhari attributes every fault to Krishna. She even goes to the extent of cursing Govinda (Stree Parva, ch. 25)

Gandhari frankly admits that she has been filled with anger at Bhima's unfair strike of Duryodhana below his navel in the very presence of Vasudeva. When Bhima refers to the many unfair black deeds of Duryodhana, she has little argument to offer in her son's defence. She only says, "Oh, why did you not spare, O child, even one son of this old couple deprived of kingdom?... Why did you not leave even one crutch for this blind couple?" (Stree Parva, ch. 15). But soon Gandhari, angry still, wants to speak to King Yudhishthira. The latter says that as the prime sinner in this act of destruction he deserves to be cursed by Gandhari. He knows that she has practised severe ascetic austerities and can not only reduce him to ashes but also consume three worlds. He falls down at her feet when from within the folds of the cloth covering her eyes she momentarily catches a glimpse of the toe which is instantly charred black. Seeing Arjuna hiding behind Vasudeva and the others shuffling nervously to escape her wrath Gandhari cools down and comforts the Pandavas. While consoling Draupadi she also takes upon herself the blame of destroying the great tribe.

All this is in keeping with normal mortal failings. Gandhari is conscious of the **adharma** perpetrated by Duryodhana and her other sons but it is not unnatural to find her losing her calm. The fact that she is not presented in an idealistic light makes Gandhari such a convincing character. She is noble but the nobility of her character is nothing unrealistic. Vyasa reminds the shaken Gandhari that when the battle began she had said "Where there is **dharma**, there surely will be victory". Now it is time for her to make use of her fortitude. Gandhari has the greatness to admit that terrible grief has robbed her of understanding. She says that pride has brought about this war and her sons deserve the fate they have met. She welcomes the Pandavas as her sons.

The pandavas behave unexceptionably towards Dhritarashtra and Gandhari after obtaining the kingdom. They try to do everything to make the latter happy.

Dhritarashtra is treated with utmost respect and Gandhari is looked after by Kunti and Draupadi. At times when Bhima gives cause for offence Gandhari feels intensely grieved. A noble soul that she is, she only looks at such moments at Kunti and finds peace. For fifteen years, though plunged in grief, she serves her husband most dutifully. She often observes fast and inflicts privations on herself. She finally retires to the forest and spends three years with Dhritarashtra and Kunti. Soon the end comes when one day a great fire engulfs the forest and the three give themselves up to the flames.

Gandhari is one of the noblest characters in the Mahabharata. To study her character is to get enlightened and ennobled. Her personal qualities as revealed through the long string of incidents make her a model of all that is great in womanhood. As mother and wife she displays through her words and deeds a largeness of heart and supreme quality of character. Rabindranath Tagore in his celebrated poem 'Gandharir Ābedan' describes how Duryodhana, who had been conversing with his father, leaves the place the moment he is told that Gandhari is coming, Dhritarashtra comments that his sudden departure is not at all surprising as he lacks the courage to confront his great mother and face the lightning flash of her glare. He refers to his son as 'punyabheeta'—one awed by the other's virtues. Indeed, this superbly telling word of the poet effectively sums up not so much the son's character as the mother's.



YUDHISTHIRA

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Yudhisthira is one of the most famous characters of the bigger epic Mahabharata. As we cannot think of the Mahabharata without Krishna, so we cannot think of this epic without Yudhisthira. He is a unique character in the Mahabharata. In that heroic age he was never a hero in the true sense of the term. His name suggests that he stood firm on the battle-field, but on no occasion we find him so bold and brave as to face his enemies. He was an idealist, but even there he failed in his idealism. He was famous for speaking truth, but he told plain lies with clean intention to kill his Guru Dronacharya on the battlefield. Still he was a saint. It was because of his failings that his brothers had to face torture and a lot of miseries, yet he was the leading man of the Pandavas.

Who were the Pandavas? As the Mahabharata and the Indian literature state they were the cousins of the Kauravas. From the Mahabharata we learn that the King Vichitravirya had two sons Dhritarashtra and Pandu. They were born of different mothers through 'Niyoga'. The latter was an old system prevalent in this country from the Vedic age. During the period of the Mahabharata this practice was in vogue and nobody frowned at it. The elder brother Dhritarashtra was blind and the younger one, Pandu was diseased. The latter had ascended the throne of the Kurus, because according to the Dharmasastras, a blind man could not be the King. Pandu lacked the productive energy to beget child. His elder wife Kunti had been blessed to call anybody, she liked. Pandu advised her to invite the god of Dharma and by him she had a son who was known as Yudhisthira. The latter was really a product of Niyoga system. Yudhisthira and all his brothers had come to Hastinapur after the death of their father. They were quite grown up at the time.

Did the Pandavas belong to the tribe of the Kurus? As Duryodhana and his brothers were known as Kauravas, descendants of Kuru, how is it that Yudhisthira and his brothers were not called Kauravas, but Pandavas, the descendants of Pandu? Some of the social customs which the Pandavas adopted were not approved in the Aryan society. The Pandava brothers had together married Draupadi. It is a clear case of polyandry. We do not find any such example in the whole range of the Indian literature. Drupada, the King of Panchala, did not agree to such a proposal but he had to contend that the custom was prevalent in the family of the Pandavas. We do not know of any king of Hastinapura who had married a girl through this custom. We know that tribes following the custom of polyandry still exist in the Himalayan belt and they observe the custom which the Pandava brothers did. The Kauravas, the so-called cousins of the Pandavas, never did so. We find clear distinction between the behaviour of the Pandavas and Kauravas. There is one point more which we must consider seriously. Why did the customs of Niyoga and polyandry, which were whole-

heartedly approved during the age of the Mahabharata existed amongst the Pandavas ? This is probably the reason why elderly persons like Bhishma and Drona who were deeply impressed with the merit and skill of the Pandavas, did not side with them in the Mahabharata war. The classical historians mentioned a tribe like Pandioi, who traced their descent to the Pandavas. If we follow the arguments analysed above, we may be inclined to believe that the Pandavas were altogether a different tribe and the author of the Mahabharata made them the cousins and rivals of the Kauravas.

Yudhisthira was a pious man and he remained so till the end of the Mahabharata. But he suffered from the weakness of gambling. A man like Yudhisthira, indulged in playing dice, is beyond our comprehension these days. A wall of time stands between us and the heroes of the Mahabharata. We cannot fully appreciate the weakness of the heroes of those days. This habit of gambling had brought a lot of misfortune to Pandava brothers, but Yudhisthira never got rid of this malady. In those days, it was supposed to be an act of heroism. Yudhisthira could not refuse the challenge of playing dice with his rivals. He suffered from this weakness for a long time. Even in his adverse circumstances when the Pandavas were in exile in secret, he played dice with King Virata.

Gambling is an old habit of the Aryan people. We find in the hymns of the Rig-Veda people losing their all in dice playing. Since then various stories are related to gambling. King Nala had lost his kingdom because of his bad habit of gambling.

We like to stress the point that Yudhisthira could not resist the temptation of dice-playing, although it had brought miseries to the Pandavas and his personal humiliation. When Yudhisthira lost his kingdom and even freedom in the play of dice with Suyodhana, Bhima in a fit of anger asked Nakula and Sahadeva to bring fire and burn his (Yudhisthira's) hands which played dice.

In spite of such a bad habit, his brothers followed him. He was a man of principle. He was a man of religious pursuits. He was a sage. He had a finer sense of distinction between good and bad, between truth and falsehood. Although Kauravas declared the Pandavas as their arch-enemies, Yudnisthira never thought of the Kauravas as such. Once Suyodhana had picked up a quarrel with the Gandharvas. The latter defeated the Kauravas and put Duryodhana in chains. While the Gandharvas were carrying him in chains, Yudhisthira asked his brothers to liberate Duryodhana from the clutches of the Gandharvas. Bhima and Arjuna promptly obeyed the order of his brother and Duryodhana was freed. This story shows how much liberal Yudhisthira was in his discretion and how much devoted his brothers were to him.

While the Pandavas were moving in the jungles, they felt thirsty. They came to a pond where they met a Vaka who was actually Yama, the god of death. The latter asked questions to persons who went to the pond to quench their thirst. If they failed to answer his questions satisfactorily, he killed them. If the passers-by replied to the satisfaction of Yama, he allowed them to quench their thirst. The four brothers of Yudhisthira had gone to the pond to fetch water, one after another and they were killed. Then Yudhisthira himself reached the place. As usual Yama

asked him “का वार्ता किमाश्चर्यम्, कः पन्था कश्चमोदते”. This is a very famous episode of the Mahabharata and people in India generally refer to these questions. An answer to these questions deals with universal truths and has deep impact on human minds. Yudhisthira replied all the four questions very calmly. He answered that the first question dealt with time and changing weather. The second question shows the inner feelings of Yudhisthira. All people in their life see people dying, but they still stick to their bad habits and actions. This is really a matter of surprise for all people who have some sense of good and bad. Such heart searching questions were stirring the minds of Indian thinkers from the time of the Upanishados. The Kathopanishad also deals with such problems. Buddha also suffered on account of such problems. It is believed that the kernel of the Mahabharata was composed sometime in the sixth century B. C. It was exactly the time when such questions were highly debated in the Indian society. The Yama became highly pleased with the answer of Yudhisthira and by his blessings they were brought to life.

Yudhisthira was a man who did not hanker after kingdom or wealth. He had begged Duryodhana to allot five villages only for the maintenance of his and his brothers' family, but Duryodhana was so uncharitable that he declined to donate even five villages. At last preparations were afoot to decide the fate of the Pandavas and Kauravas in a war.

Yudhisthira was really a victim of psychological crisis. If we deeply follow the events of the great epic, we come to the conclusion that Yudhisthira in his heart of hearts had a desire to sit on the throne of his ancestors. But he was afraid of the horror that follows a war and war was imminent in that case. We can name his thinking as latent thoughts.

There were two persons at least on the side of the Pandavas, who wanted to decide their fate on the field of battle. They were Krishna and Draupadi. Krishna took every step for the safeguard of the Pandavas, he tried to win over Karna to make the war a successful one, but in the innermost of his heart, he wanted the total destruction of the Kauravas and the whole political system prevalent in that age.

Draupadi was born to destroy the Kaurava dynasty. The Kauravas and Pandavas both, as students of Dronacharya, had humiliated King Drupada of Panchala. Draupadi, the daughter of Drupada, was born to revenge the humiliation of her father. She had suffered a lot at the hands of Yudhisthira. The latter had gambled her and lost her. Being the queen of the Pandavas and daughter-in-law of Dhritarashtra, she was dragged to the Court of the Kauravas and in presence of all the elders of the Court, Duhshasana had tried to make her naked. Duryodhana had patted his thigh and hinted Draupadi to sit on his thigh. What a shameful drama was being enacted in the Court of Kauravas at Hastinapura! Yudhisthira had no courage to resist the attempts of Duhshasana and Duryodhana. All the Pandava heroes followed their eldest brother, Yudhisthira. The latter was a wise man. Is it the proof of his wisdom?

At last all the efforts of Krishna for an amicable settlement were frustrated by the Kauravas and the armies of both sides began to take field in the famous battle-field

of Kurukshetra. Yudhisthira had no vital role to play. Now the war was at his doors.

Yudhisthira himself was not a soldier. He had no taste for war and did not enjoy the war. He had deep abhorrence for war. He was ready to please the Kauravas by accepting only five villages afforded to them. But there was none to convey his message to the opposite party. Krishna, at long last, took the responsibility of trying once more to see the Kauravas and stop the war and find out some means for the subsistence of the Pandavas. The Kauravas refused the negotiation at point blank and told Krishna that they were not ready to part with even a pin point portion of their territory. Krishna returned to the camp of the Pandavas frustrated, but determined to strike hard. Yudhisthira was still not calm, his agony had increased, because final preparation for war was afoot. A deep and critical study of in between the lines of the slokas of the Mahabharata leads us to believe that even Yudhisthira, in his heart of hearts, was eager to win the war and enjoy the blessings of a victor. At this point his character may be well compared with that of Dhritarashtra who pretended to look after the interests of his nephews, but at the same time, wished his sons should be victorious.

The Mahabharata is a product of heroic age. All the people decided their fate at the point of sword. It was only Yudhisthira who tried for peaceful means to solve the problem between the Pandavas and Kauravas. Why so? He was not a hero who could enjoy the resoundings of sword's rattling in the battle-field. He was never a chivalrous man. He thought on a new line which we may call non-Aryan. The Aryans decided their fate in the battle-field. The thinking of Yudhisthira was an early stage of **ahimsa**. He was not like Buddha and Mahavira who fully believed in the principles of **ahimsa**. But he was in search of a peaceful means to solve his problems before he was compelled to fight.

When the armies of both the parties stood in the battle-field of Kurukshetra, Yudhisthira touched the feet of his elders before he could hurl arms on them. In spite of all these weak points, he was the most revered man of his age. In his heart of hearts, he believed in "सत्यमेव जयते". On the twelfth day of battle, when Dronacharya was massacreing the Pandava army, Yudhisthira had to tell a lie, an act which he had never done in his life. He uttered "अश्वत्थामा हतो नरोऽवाकुञ्जरो". Yudhisthira had fabricated the truth, although he knew fully well that Aswathama the son of Drona was still alive. He is still condemned for this lie. Had such lies been spoken by Bhima or Arjuna, nothing could have been murmured, but it was by Yudhisthira who never uttered any false-hood. The Mahabharata tells us that one of the toes of Yudhisthira hell as punishment. He was still the most pious man of the Mahabharata.

BHIMA THE INVINCIBLE SIMPLETON

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The *Mahabharata*, an unparalleled literary tradition of antiquity, is astonishingly modern in terms of dilemmas and agonies faced by its characters and the messages that its episodes seek to convey. Beginning as a relatively shorter poem of 8800 verses in the form of *Jaya Samhita* some time around 900 B. C., it matured into a 100000 verses text by the beginning of the 4th century A.D. Any reliance on the historicity of the text-content, therefore, is sadly misplaced¹; it should be taken essentially as a literary creation with almost unrecognisable traces of historicity. In fact, it is the inter-play of characters, the analysis of human motives and their qualities and drawbacks, and the careful portrayal of events leading to intelligible conclusions, that makes the *Mahabharata* a text *par excellence*.

An analysis of the characters of the major participants of the *Mahabharata* was clearly suggests that the text is more than a work which Hindus look upon as divinely inspired and venerated. It becomes a record of complex humanity and a mirror to all the forces and masks which we ourselves wear; it is almost a sordid and pathetic reflection of our own struggles desires and motives. These aspects of the *Mahabharata* have not been considered with due weightage all the time, so much so that even in the analysis of the main characters one comes across confusing the illogical stances taken up by numerous scholars. Thus way back in 1899 R. C. Dutt made a misleading comparison, "The good and royal Yudhisthira, the 'tiger waisted' Bhima and the 'helmet-wearing' Arjuna are the Agamemnon, the Ajax and the Achilles of the Indian epic."² It is needless to add that such comparisons are irrational for the temper of Vyāsa's epic, as well as of its characters, is completely different from the Homeric epics and their characters. This tradition of such misfounded perceptions hardly seems to have sensitivised itself even about a century after Dutt.³ The problem with such analyses is their unbalanced approach—while studying a character the level of discussion is sought to be raised either to the domain of the supra-mundane or to a too mundane zone of enquiry. The result in both the cases is atrocious. The characters of the text have to be viewed as normal human beings, as passionate and warm as ourselves, who are striving to achieve their goals in life and in the process, are facing the dilemmas of human existence. And one of the most humane personalities of the epic is Bhīma, a character that mirrors to a great extent not only the ideal but also the real passions and reactions of a normal human being. The present paper, therefore, attempts at understanding Vyāsa's portrayal of a normal human being by studying the character of Bhīma.

The popular picture of Bhīma in common parlance as a hard-headed, constantly eating mountain of strength, though erroneous, highlights an affable aspect of his

character. He was a target of jokes right from his childhood due to his excessive fondness for food. Even Duryodhana, his arch-rival, made fun of him on this point, but Bhīma true to his simplistic character took such things in his stride and, at times, even derived pleasure from it. Laughing at others illustrates one's negative personality, but laughing at one's own expense is decidedly the sign of a vigorously healthy outlook. Bhīma is one of the rarest examples of the latter category and this attribute singles him out as one of the most appreciable character of this drama, a drama with a high voltage tension.

The capacity of tolerance that Bhīma has is further illustrated by his lifelong relationship with Duryodhana. Both were born on the same day; so they were of the same age. But endowed with unmatched strength and an exuberant vitality that was neither fully sensitive nor even fleetingly malicious, Bhīma had bullied the Kaurava brothers in their boyhood days and foiled their various machinations. The reaction of the Kauravas is, however, most unworthy of their parentage as well as the existing social norms. Lacking the finesse to handle him and incapable of licking him in these encounters, the eldest of the Kauravas reacts with a violence that is unnatural at this age. Duryodhana, taking advantage of Bhīma's fondness for food, poisons him and finally drops him in the river with the help of Duśśāsana. He is not only vile in his actions, his motivations are also sinister, "I shall see that he drowns. Then I shall seize his elder and younger brothers, imprison them and rule the land"⁴. But in spite of this attitudinal negativeness and sinister designs of Duryodhana, Bhīma is strong enough to ignore them, even his attempted murder, a development that underlines the moral strength of his character. His psychology is decidedly uncomplicated—initial adverse reaction and then the spirit of "forgive and forget".

The straight 'forwardness of Bhīma's personality is, at times, sought to be negated by citing the incident involving the final duel between him and Duryodhana. Balarāma has been chosen to articulate this tirade against Bhīma. The former, who had gone on a pilgrimage on the eve of the Bharata war obviously to escape from his responsibilities, learnt from Nārada about the rout of the Kauravas and arrived just in time for the last fight between Bhīma and Duryodhana both of whom were his disciples in combat with mace. He was mad with rage when he saw Bhīma smashing Duryodhana's thigh by throwing into the winds the basic rules of mace-combat. He got so violently enraged that he nearly killed Bhīma but for the dogged intervention of Kṛṣṇa. But this hardly stopped him from praising Duryodhana for fairness and condemning Bhīma as a warrior who had dishonoured the Knightly code⁵. It is needless to add that neither the praise nor the condemnation is impartial. While it is a common knowledge that the Pāṇḍavas did many unethical things during the course of the war, it is indubitable that this particular action by Bhīma was not as heinous as it was made out to be by Balarāma. For, after the infamous dice game, and sit on his lap, an action that would have forced even the most impotent amongst men to retribution and Bhīma, naturally enough, had flared up and had vowed to smash that thigh. Even an ascetic, Maitreya, whom Duryodhana had once insulted had cursed

him that Bhīma would smash his thigh with the mace. Duryodhana, therefore, had received sufficient warnings, and an impartial Balarāma should have recalled the episode of Draupadī's humiliation and would have taken Duryodhana's fall as a fully deserved retribution. But this was not to be, for Balarāma's impartiality is tainted as "there was a residuary bias in him towards Duryodhana"⁶. Interestingly the last sentence that he utters before going on a pilgrimage on the eve of the Bharata war is illustrative, "It is difficult for me to stay here and see the ruin of the Kauravas"⁷. His Kaurava sympathies are too obvious to be ignored and it was precisely due to this frame of mind that Balarāma abused Bhīma right and left, for he could not tolerate the killing of a man so dear to him. This action of Bhīma, therefore, has to be viewed in the wider gamut of relationships in inter-play in the story, a perspective that will almost resolve him of the alleged crime for which he is so viciously held responsible by Balarāma.

Bhīma's straight forwardness and his total distancing from making intrigues is also illustrated by the episode involving Duryodhana and Chitrasena. Duryodhana, instigated by Karna, who says that looking down upon enemy in his discomfiture gives greater pleasure than the birth of a child, earning wealth or winning a realm, went to the forests on the pretext of inspecting cattle to parade his pomp before the poverty of the Pāṇḍavas and picked up a quarrel with Chitrasena in which he was devastated. The table was completely turned over him. Though Bhīma, initially felt delighted at his adversary's discomfiture, went to his rescue after he was impressed upon to do so by Yudhiṣṭhira.⁸ The episode lays bare two important attributes of Bhīma's personality. First, he had a natural reaction of delight when his lifelong enemy Duryodhana was reduced to a pitiable condition though he had come to laugh at his cousins, but when impressed upon by Yudhiṣṭhira that the Kuru clan was dishonoured when the Kaurava princesses were allowed to be harassed by the soldiery of Chitrasena he rescues his arch-rival, i.e. forgets the past at least temporarily unlike his ever-scheming adversary. Secondly Bhīma is so committed and loyal to his elder brother that he goes on to help Duryodhana, even though it was a task that he would not have liked to perform at any cost,

Bhīma's loyalty to his elder brother and his attempt to honour even unpalatable orders of Yudhiṣṭhira is further illustrated by the treatment meted out to Jayadratha. Once, when Pāṇḍavas had gone hunting during their exile in the forests, Jayadratha came upon Draupadī and fascinated by her beauty tried to carry her off. But after being given a chase by the Pāṇḍavas, who almost immediately returned, Jayadratha allowed Draupadī to dismount from his chariot and drove away for fear of life. Bhīma was determined to catch him and Draupadī wanted his head in vengeance. Caught he was, but not killed for Yudhiṣṭhira told them that Jayadratha was the husband of Dussalā: the only daughter of Gāndhārī. Bhīma, who normally did not tolerate any humiliation of Draupadī, immediately towed his brother's line of argument and Jayadratha was let loose with admonitions to behave better in future.⁹ For Bhīma the order of his elder brother was *dharma*, an order that was to be executed at all costs. This explains as to why even after the short-tempered nature of Bhīma, the Pāṇḍava remained united in spite of numerous adversities.

Bhīma's respect for his elder brother is also suggested by the way he lost an argument to him during their thirteenth year of exile. In a poignant debate Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Draupadi. Yudhiṣṭhira in contradistinction to the others took the stance that it would have been unpardonably immoral on his part to take any steps to recover their lost realm before the expiry of the tenure of exile to which he has committed. Bhīma vehemently opposed the stand but when the elder brother explained that Bhīṣma, Droṇāchārya, Kṛpāchārya, Karṇa and all the vanquished rulers defeated by the Pāṇḍavas at the time of the performance of the Rājasūya sacrifice would fight for the Kauravas,¹⁰ he was temporarily silenced. He, however, had an alternative to suggest. He wanted Yudhiṣṭhira to accept Kṛṣṇa's proposal who had on earlier occasion offered him to win the kingdom for him. Bhīma further proposed that he himself would lead the army and Yudhiṣṭhira could return to the forests to keep his pledged word after the enemies had been annihilated.¹¹ The idea was not pursued by Bhīma further because Yudhiṣṭhira refused to go by it. Bhīma true to his character was being guided by the transient situation rather than his brain, but once the elder brother firmly put his feet down he retreated. Thus, here is a man who cannot become crafty even if he tries, a man who will accept his elder brother's stand whatsoever be his own personal whims.

The intensity of Bhīma's love for his elder brother is too deep to be fathomable, a point which is vividly illustrated by the famous post-dice Draupadi episode in the *Mahabharata*. The famous dice contest is seemingly a turning point in the history of Kuru family.¹² As Yudhiṣṭhira went on steadily losing at every throw of the dice, he came to be seized by the gambler's frenzy, flaunting his wealth and losing them at the stake one by one. Then he staked himself, lost the gamble and was reminded by the unscrupulous Śakuni about the last "thing" that he should stake, Draupadi. Surprisingly, instead of vehemently rejecting the suggestion, he advertised his ware, the value of his stake, by enumerating the charms of his wife, her lovely tresses, red lips and narrow waist.¹³

She too was lost and was dragged to the court by Duṣṣāṇa. When the impotent Kuru assembly started debating the issue of whether a slave, as Yudhiṣṭhira had become after he pledged himself, could stake a free person, i.e. Draupadi, most of the participants tried to evade the issue so much so that getting a cue Duryodhana wanted the four younger Pāṇḍavas to open out about the elder brother's actions. It is here that one again gets a close look at Bhīma's total commitment to his elder brother. He, who earlier during this sordid drama had, in a virtually uncontrollable rage, wanted to burn the gambling hands of Yudhiṣṭhira, did not disown him when challenged directly. He fretted and fumed at the treatment that was meted out to Draupadi but when it came to the ultimate judgement, he coolly followed his elder brother into exile.

That Bhīma was not a dumb follower of Yudhiṣṭhira is also beyond doubt. There are instances of Bhīma seriously questioning the stance of his elder brother. During the exile, on one occasion, when the sorrows and frustrations of Draupadi erupt in a

long tirade,¹⁴ Bhīma takes side against Yudhiṣṭhira. "She tries to reason logically and philosophically, but it is clear that the chain of reasoning starts with a bitter memory, her humiliation in the presence of the entire Kaurava assembly, the derisive laughter of Duryodhana and his aides. To Yudhiṣṭhira, who claims to abide firmly by the moral imperative; she retorts that his morality did not look after him but brought instead great and undeserved calamity. This leads her momentarily to the feeling that the world is either ruled by a malevolent power (like the vindictive president of the Immortals of Thomas Hardy) or totally lacks any ordering principle. But she gives up this sterile position, passionately advocated activism and constant endeavour on the part of man and openly declares her feeling that Yudhiṣṭhira's moralism is really a mask for the lack of courage."¹⁵ Bhīma, who had also been tormented by the miseries and who too possibly failed to comprehend the rationale behind the ethical and moral ways of Yudhiṣṭhira in the light of the totally unscrupulous and immoral methods of the Kauravas, joined Draupadi and pointedly asked his elder brother if it was not really because the latter lacked courage that he went on repeating the immorality involved in breaking his pledge about remaining in exile and taking immediate steps to recover his kingdom.¹⁶ One may say that Bhīma was becoming amoral here, but that was certainly a natural human reaction. Bhīma, a simpleton as he was, failed to appreciate the pursuance of an ethical politics in an age which had come to be dominated by the Machiavellian norms. He, unlike Yudhiṣṭhira, was not carrying the load of dharma on his shoulders and, therefore, there was nothing wrong when he challenged his elder brother though he did not force the issue.

Bhīma's reactions to issues and events, though spontaneous, was hardly balanced. A number of instances can be cited to illustrate this point. When Karna entered the arena uninvited where the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas were to exhibit their skills, it led to unexpected developments. Arjuna was challenged by Karna, the latter was crowned as king of Anga by Duryodhana and a showdown became imminent. Then marched in Adhiratha, the father and the son embraced each other, and Karna's hope of gaining Kṣatriyahood was shattered. This was an anti-climax, a saddening development but an obvious relief for the Pāṇḍavas, and Bhīma true to his character seized the opportunity to rub salt in the wound, "You should hold a whip to suit your trade and not a sword."¹⁶ A similar uncouth reaction is noticed on another occasion also. At the time of the Rājasūya the Pāṇḍavas deliberately showed off their affluence which was a provocation for Duryodhana and his group. The palace of the Pāṇḍavas was so magnificent that Duryodhana almost felt trapped, trapped like an incapable hungry tiger in a room full of deers. Then began his miseries; he mistook a polished plaza for a placid pool and drew up his robe followed by a reversal of the mistake making him fall into a pool. Bhīma and Arjuna with Draupadi and all her maids burst into laughter, and with the tactless Bhīma the laughter had a distinct ring of contempt. It is worthwhile to note that this incident does not find a place in the direct narration but in the raging and humiliated recall of Duryodhana, whose pride is wounded to such an extent that he exclaims that, if he could have done it, he would have murdered Bhīma on the spot;¹⁷ this is decidedly illustrative of

of the humiliation heaped upon Duryodhana by Bhīma. Such sadistic reactions on the part of Bhīma, which may fleetingly seem natural, provide a negative dimension to his character.

This negative attribute of Bhīma's character, however, need not be unduly emphasised, for he was full of humane sensibilities. Besides his total commitment to his elder brother, his attitude towards some of his enemies is also praiseworthy. The dice contest, perhaps the most crucial episode in the epic leading to appalling wrongs due to the outburst of animosities simmering over the decades, may be recounted once again. The utter humiliation of Draupadi was retorted to in explicit terms only by Vidura and Vikarna, though the group as a whole virtually endorsed Duryodhana's stand by their apathetic tolerance. But tragically enough this mass effect was too gross to have the subtle discrimination to spare even persons like Vikarna, who had deeply sympathised with Draupadi. But Bhīma fully realised this situation but he was helpless for he was bound by his vow to kill all the 100 Kaurava brothers. The following words that Bhīma utters after the duel in the field where he slays Vikarna not only reflects his sorrow but also illustrates the deep humane attributes of his character, "I made the vow that I will kill you all in war. That is why you have fallen by my hand. Mindful of your duty as a Kshatriya, you came to battle and fell in battle, for cruel is the law of war. Through justice or injustice, the great Bhishma too, who was always concerned with the well-being of Yudhishthira and of us had fallen in the field. Undeniable is it that terribly cruel is the way of war" 18. Bhīma here not only grieves for his noble enemy but acknowledges the concept of Kārmic logic. He, in fact, goes on to compare the death of Vikarna with that of Bhīma, decidedly the most respected amongst the Kurus, and there by seeks to justify a cause, which possibly was unjustifiable for him in his own heart of hearts. And this mental predicament for a brother of Duryodhana. This humanistic trait of his character needs better appreciation.

It was this humanism that also provided a distinct simplicity to the personality of Bhīma. This aspect of his character is well illustrated in his confessions before Gāndhārī. She, after getting the news of Duryodhana's death, became revengefully angry. She, however, did not bewail so much the death of her eldest son as the manner in which he had been done to death, by a treacherous blow below the waist. Bhīma was almost doomed before the rage of Gāndhārī, but for his frankness. Though trembling, he admitted before her the invisibility of Duryodhana and also his imminent death at the hands of the latter, hence the wrong to save his own life¹⁹. Bhīma obviously had the guts to admit his mistake and also the courage to state frankly the whole situation. The element of frankness and the strength to accept one's wrong doings are powerful traits of Bhīma's character.

This simplicity of Bhīma's personality was at times exploited by Draupadi. The Kichaka episode is a case in point. The Pāṇḍavas, after completing twelve years of their exile in forest, were spending the thirteenth year in the capital of Virāṭa in effective disguises to escape identification from Duryodhana's spies. This was a crucial period for them as a successful termination of this phase of disguise could end their miseries. But if things went wrong, the whole cycle of thirteen years' exile was

to be repeated. And the Pāṇḍavas' disguise was threatened due to an incident that centered around Draupadi. She was living in the disguise of a maid to Sudeśanā, the wife of king Virāṭa. Draupadi was extremely beautiful and the queen feared the diversion of Virāṭa's attention. Naturally, therefore, when her brother Kīchaka, who was not only the brother-in-law but also the army commander of Virāṭa, disclosed his desire for Draupadi, the queen was only too glad to send her on some pretext to her brother in the dead of night. Kīchaka tried to molest Draupadi. She stormed into the presence of the king and angrily recounted the offence²⁰. The assembly condemned Kīchaka but she could not be satisfied with anything less than the death of the man. Of all the brothers, she goes to Bhīma to get Kīchaka killed. Bhīma, in spite of his non-intriguing nature comprehends the gravity of the situation and realises that this act may blow their cover, a realisation that proved to be almost true when the Pāṇḍavas had to fight for Virāṭa, in the absence of Kīchaka, against the combined forces of Suśarmā and Duryodhana. But Draupadi could not be placated and made to see reason and by threatening to commit suicide by taking poison if the next dawn found Kīchaka still alive, she forced Bhīma to kill Kīchaka the same night. Bhīma was obviously exploited, rather her deep sense of attachment to Draupadi was utilised in a way that was not a very sober act at the given point of time. But then Bhīma's desire to protect Draupadi's honour and to take revenge of its violation is almost obsessive. After the dice game, when Duśśāsana, by declaring that Draupadi was now a slave, dragged her by hair before the entire assembly, Bhīma flew into a rage. Helpless as he was at that time not to physically intervene, nevertheless, he was provoked to make and declare the vow that Draupadi's tresses would remain unbraided till he braided them with his own hands wet with the blood of Duśśāsana killed in war. Similarly when Duryodhana bared his thigh and insultingly invited Draupadi to sit on his laps, Bhīma, boiling with utter rage and frustration, took the vow that he would smash that thigh in battle. Humiliated and enraged by the enormity of the insult heaped upon Draupadi he went on to vow that he would kill all the hundred Kauravabrothers. These declarations of Bhīma not only reflect his love for Draupadi but also portray him as the brother with an obsessive concern for maintaining the pride, prestige and honour of the Pāṇḍavas and an ever readiness to avenge their violation.

Bhīma, besides being an ideal husband, also comes up as an extremely devoted son to her mother, Kunti. After the *laksagraha* attempt on their lives the Pāṇḍavas were on an escape trail; it was Bhīma who carried all his brothers and mother through the forest. They rested at a place and Bhīma by that time had become dog-tired. Kunti asked for water and of all the brothers it was Bhīma who went for it. On return when he found her mother sleeping on bare earth he was deeply saddened. This is an episode that amply testifies to Bhīma's love for and obedience to his mother²¹. The killing of the demon Baka by Bhīma is also an example of blind obedience of the son to Kunti, on the one hand, and the greater amount of confidence that mother reposed in his prowess, on the other. This ideal mother-son relationship is an important feature of Bhīma's personality with its essentially human outlook.

The martial spirit that all pervasively permeates the personality of Bhīma is not shallow. In fact, time and again Bhīma has been projected as the embodiment of prowess. After Pāṇḍava's marriage with Draupadi and their coming out in the open, Duryodhana in order to destroy them told Karna, "Divide Kunti's three sons from their two step-brothers, the sons of Mādrī; or offer Drupada money for turning the Pāṇḍavas over to us. Or if nothing else, let us at least destroy Bhīma, for he is a constant thorn in my side"²². So out of many alternatives to destroy the Pāṇḍavas, one was to kill Bhīma, a situation that indicates the incomparable status of Bhīma. Similarly when Yudhiṣṭhira learnt with consternation that mother had decided to send Bhīma to the demon, Baka, in place of a member of the family of the brāhmaṇa who had given them shelter, he accused her of a grave folly for Bhīma was the person on whom they had to rely primarily for winning back their kingdom. Bhīma was, therefore, an embodiment of strength and success in the eyes of both his friends and enemies.

But this martiality of Bhīma's personality should not be blown up to the extent that it may undermine this man's capacity to argue the subtlest issues of philosophy and logic. In his discussion with Yudhiṣṭhira for giving up the exile and attempt recovery of their lost empire, he uses a profoundly perceptive conceptual frame when he says that "moral integrity is the highest principle and the base of the world's ordering"²³. But his conviction seems to lack the firmness of his declaration. Because Yudhishtira wants to stand by his integrity and will not take any step to recover his kingdom before he has finished his term of exile, he has reduced himself, his consort and his brothers to this miserable life of wild beasts of the forests which only the weak will have the resignation to accept. 'Keeping one's word is a senseless imperative' when this is the consequence. This is a radical assertion since it implies the rejection of the subordinate status of ethical norms and Bhīma has to defend it. Wealth and eros now become equal principles with the categorical imperative, cease to be subordinate to it, 'Man should not dedicate himself solely to ethics, or to wealth or to eros; he should equally realise all the three'. If ethics should be the basis for wealth, wealth in its turn should be recognised as reciprocally the basis of ethics. This comes dangerously near to equating morality with expediency. Perhaps Bhīma realises this, for he changes over, rather abruptly, to another argument; the duty of the Kshatriya to fight for justice. Nevertheless, there is merit in Bhīma's plea that the kshatriya who strives with all his life in the fight for justice should be recognised as on par with the ascetic who embraces the life of hard austerities"²⁴. Thus, Bhīma not only had a firm grip over philosophy but was also capable of persuasive argumentation, a trait of Bhīma's character which is normally ignored.

Another important feature of his personality was his ability to interact with the aliens as well. His marriage to Hidimbā is a case in point. This was actually a marriage between the Āryan and the indigenous culture, an event that illustrates the processes of acculturation in play at that point of time. Bhīma, in fact, should be taken as one of the greatest Āryanisers in Indian history.

Bhīma, the embodiment of power, is, therefore, a multi-faceted character. He is a committed brother, a loving husband, an obedient son and a protector of family

honour and pride. His simplicity, no doubt, makes him prone to exploitation and undignified reactions at times, yet he is a man, who alongwith his uncontestable prowess is also well-versed in philosophy and logic. He is an ideal character, a character who is also the best suited for the dissemination of Āryan culture.

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18. *Ibid.*, *Drona Parvan*, 137.
19. *Ibid*, *Stri Parvan*, 14.
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21. P. Lal, however, interprets, this event to suggest Kunti's desire to make her son tough, so that he would be better suited to face the dangers of life (*op. cit.*, p. 31), This is, however, an odd, suggestion.
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PRINCE ARJUNA

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1. The central theme of the Mahabharata :

The central theme of the great epic of Vyasa, *Mahabharata*, is the vindication of *dharma*, i.e. righteous or moral duty. *Yato dharmastato jayah* means that adherence to one's moral duty shall always and ultimately be adorned with victory. And the goal of a righteous life on earth is to attain *moksha* (liberation as expounded in the *Shantiparva—Shantiparva Mahaphalah*. The *Mahabharata* is a great museum of human characters, both divine and undivine, *daivik* and *asurik*. The *asurik* forces are represented by the *Kauravas* and the *daivik* forces, based on *dharma* are represented by the *Pandavas*, of whom Yudhisthira, the righteous eldest brother and Arjuna, the courageous third brother are the chief characters, who derive their moral authority from Lord Krishna and the *Vedas*. The great battle of Kurukshetra ultimately decides the victory of *dharma* and in this epic drama Prince Arjuna is the hero or the chief character. *Shrimad Bhagavat Gita*, the preachings of Lord Krishna to Prince Arjuna, to motivate the latter to fight a righteous war, are eighteen chapters of the *Bhishmaparva* of *Mahabharata*. Sanjaya concludes the significance of Arjuna thus :

“Yatra yogeshvarah Krishna yatra Partho dhanurdharah
Tatra shrirvijayobhutirdhruva nitirmatirmama.”

(Gita, XVIII, 78)

“Where there is Krishna, the master of *yoga*, and where there is Arjuna the wielder of the bow, there, in my view shall fortune, victory and general prosperity be, as also unwavering justice and moral awareness.”

Gita sings the glory of the philosophy of total vision, which “synthesises action and contemplation, the secular and the sacred, reason and faith, the human and the divine,” according to Swami Ranganathananda....(*The Message of the Upanishads*, p. 152).

2. The Model :

To evaluate a classic character like that of Prince Arjuna, we have to bear in mind the above total synthetic vision of life of *Gita* and the central theme of the *Mahabharata*. As the message of the *Gita* is said to be the cream of the *Upanishads*, so also the *Isha Upanishad* is said to be the rarest jewel of all the *Upanishads*. That classic character is a perfect character, which translates through actions of life the synthetic vision of the *Isha Upanishad* and the *Gita*.

The eleventh verse of the *Isha Upanishad* tells us in a nutshell the synthetic philosophy of life for *mumukshu jivas*, aspirants for liberation :

**Vidyam chavidyam cha yastadvedovayam saha,
Avidyaya mrityum tirtva vidyayamritamashnute.**

“He who knows *vidya* (Knowledge of Being or Brahman) and *avidya* (Knowledge of Becoming or the sciences of the world), together, by *avidya* he surpasses death and by *vidya* tastes immortality.”

Sambhuti and *asambhuti* or *Vinasha* are synonyms for *Vidya* and *avidya* in the *Ishopanishad*.

In the words of Swami Ranganathananda, “man needs the combination, in his character, of Yoga, or the transcendental vision of Krishna, and the Promethean fire of Arjuna.” Apparently Krishna, as the master of *Yoga*, represents the height of spiritual vision, *vidya*, and Arjuna, the warrior Kshatriya Prince, represents *avidya* or the man of action and endeavour, the intensely practical man, who is temporarily overwhelmed by doubt and depression. In the attempt to dispel the doubt and depression of Arjuna, through his synthetic vision, Krishna succeeds in encouraging Arjuna not only to wield the bow, but also to wield it in such a way as to reach the point of actionlessness (*akarma* state of the *sthitaprajna* or the liberated soul) through intense action of fighting, just by surrendering the fruits of action to God. Swami Ranganathananda has summarised this metamorphosis of Arjuna in his inimitable style as follows : “Arjuna was the fighter, the man of action, in the battle field. But the action of Arjuna had the strength of Krishna’s vision behind it. That made it not the blind self-cancelling, inefficient action of the ego, but the steady, purposeful and efficient action of the illumined mind, of the *buddhi*. Action becomes a snare and a defeat for man, when it does not draw nourishment from his true self, which is the Self of all. Action illumined by the Knowledge of the Self becomes

itself illumination, and ceases to be mere action. Work becomes worship. All true action finds its consummation in illumination, says the *Gita* (IV, 33). The combination of vision and action is what the *Gita* teaches, through which man achieves a double efficiency, namely, practical efficiency by which he becomes a productive unit of society and enhances its life and welfare, and spiritual, inward efficiency, by which he achieves the awareness of his immortal divine nature." (*Ibid*, p. p. 153, 154).

3. Arjuna's Qualities as Described by Others :

At the time of Arjuna's birth, his mother Kunti heard an oracle : "O Kunti, this infant shall be as courageous as Parashuram, as powerful as Vishnu, the best among warriors and very famous."

In the words of Lord Krishna :

"No other person than Arjuna possesses the qualities of strength, stamina, courage, agility, efficiency, optimism and patience in abundance."

(Udyog Parva 59/27-29)

The grandsire Bhishma had to admit that there was no other warrior on earth comparable to himself than Dhananjaya, the son of Kunti and a lion among men. (Dhananjaya and Partha are other names of Arjuna).

Kunti once waxed eloquent on the qualities of Arjuna : "He can throw five hundred arrows at one stroke, he can be compared to the sun in brightness, he is like a *Maharshi* in controlling his passions, he is as magnanimous in pardoning as the earth and in valour he is like *Mahendra*." (Udyog Parva 90/29-34)

Even Dhritarashtra, the blind father of Duryodhana, the chief enemy of Arjuna, had the candour of admitting that "When *Savyasachi* (Arjuna), the wielder of the bow, who can throw arrows with both hands, sits on his chariot, he can conquer the world without any assistance from others." (Udyog Parva 22/10)

When once Duryodhana was abusing Dronacharya for his failure to kill Arjuna, Karna, the conceited warrior in the camp of the Kauravas said politely : "O King, it is futile to abuse the *Acharya*, for Arjuna is younger in age, proficient in battle, dexterous in wielding weapons, master of the art of warfare and famous in battle. Moreover, it is impossible for the *Acharya* to defeat Arjuna, when Krishna is his charioteer."

On the deathbed of arrows, Bhishma, the Commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army, entreated Duryodhana for armistice with the Pandavas after

praising Arjuna thus : "Darling, you can never defeat that great man, who can accomplish this herculean task (of defeating me)." (Bhishma Parva 121/43).

4. Qualities of Arjuna as Revealed by His Statements and Actions

Arjuna learnt the art of fighting and wielding different weapons from Acharya Kripa and Acharya Drona. He was the best of the disciples of Dronacharya. He could throw arrows with equal efficiency with both hands. Once while Dronacharya was bathing in the Ganges, he was caught by a crocodile, but Arjuna cut it to pieces with five arrows. At this Dronacharya became very pleased with Arjuna and gifted him the rare divine weapon, called *Brahmashiro*. He also blessed Arjuna saying : "You will be second to none on earth in wielding the bow."

Prince Arjuna mastered not only the art of fighting, but also other spiritual and secular sciences. His knowledge of the scriptures was in no way inferior to his knowledge of the weapons of war. He could even sing and dance and actually became the teacher of music and dance of Uttara, the daughter of king *Virat*, in the pseudonym of *Vrihannala*, while the Pandavas were spending one year incognito in the Kingdom of *Virat*.

When Yudhisthira ascended the throne, he used to carry on administration of his Kingdom on the advice of Lord Krishna and on the military strength of Bhima and Arjuna, who was made the Commander-in-chief.

Prince Arjuna had such wonderful control over his passions and speech that he never crossed the barrier of decorum and decency and never lost his temper even under the severest of provocations. After the completion of *Rajasuya Yajna* by Yudhisthira, Dhritrashtra became jealous and permitted Duryodhana to invite Yudhisthira to the game of dice on the advice of Shakuni, the crooked uncle of Duryodhana. Yudhisthira entered into the deceitful game of dice, a kind of gambling which though declared immoral in *Manusmriti*, was accepted according to convention during the decadent age of the Mahabharata. However, Yudhisthira had not consulted Lord Krishna and his other four brothers. Hence, when he was repeatedly defeated by Shakuni in the prearranged deceitful game and lost his kingdom and even his wife, Draupadi as the last pawn, she was openly insulted in the court of Dhritrashtra by Duhshashana. At this Bhima got furious and wanted to burn the hands of Yudhisthira, but Arjuna maintained a cool temper and said, "It would be most unwise to chastise our eldest brother, who is the incarnation of *dharma*" (Sabha P. 68/8). Though Arjuna had won Draupadi in a

swayamvara (open selection of the spouse by the bride) and shared her with the other brothers on the inadvertant order of mother Kunti, he demonstrated ideal patience in controlling his sorrow and frustration.

When the Pandavas were starting for the jungle after losing their kingdom for the second time as a result of defeat of Yudhisthira in the second gambling, Karna, Duryodhana, Duhshashana and other courtiers were taunting the Pandava brothers in very filthy language. Bhima lost his temper and promised to inflict many kinds of sufferings on the Kauravas, but Arjuna maintained his balance of mind and said that virtuous persons do not express their anger in such a way, rather they perform what they intend to accomplish. Of course, Arjuna also decided to kill Karna in due course, though he did not express his feelings like Bhima.

On the advice of Yudhisthira, Arjuna went to *Indraloka* for fetching a divine weapon. Indra the King of heavens offered him many luxuries in heaven to entice Arjuna, but he insisted on winning the divine weapon alone. Arjuna was asked to meditate on Lord Shiva, who tested his strength and aspiration in a fake battle in the disguise of a hunter. Finally Shiva was pleased and bequeathed the *pashupat* weapon to Arjuna. Arjuna thereafter stayed in the heaven for some time and learnt singing and dancing from Chitrasen, the King of *Gandharvas*. At the instance of Indra, Chitrasen sent *Urvashee*, the most beautiful dancer of heaven, to spend a night with Arjuna. But Arjuna refused the offer and said, "O mother, I never looked at you with a lustful eye, while you were dancing, for I respect you just like my own mother Kunti or *Sachidevi*, the wife of Indra, as in a sense, you are the mother of the Kuru dynasty." At this Urvashi felt jilted and insulted, and cursed Arjuna that he would move among women, as an impotent dancer. When Indra learnt of Arjuna's predicament, he praised Arjuna's unrivalled control of character and consoled him by telling him that Urvashi's curse would prove to be a blessing in disguise at the time of travelling incognito. Indra further informed Maharshi Lomasha that in his previous incarnation, Arjuna was *Nara-Rishi*, who worshipped God and performed severe penances at *Badari Ashram*, along with *Narayan Rishi*, who later took the incarnation of *Krishna* on earth for the welfare of mankind. (Vana Parva 47/10-14).

At the last lap of their exile, when the Pandava brothers were spending a year incognito in the capital of Virat, the king of *Matsyarajya*, Arjuna was appointed as the teacher of dance and music in the harem of Virat, for Arjuna was then known as *Vrihannala*, a eunuch. Just before two days of the expiry of the

period of exile, Arjuna (Vrihannala) had to wield the bow to defeat single-handed, the army of the Kauravas, led by Duryodhana himself, who had gone to the kingdom of Virat to steal his herd of cattle. However, Arjuna did not take the life of anyone, for he applied his skill of striking to make the enemy unconscious, without killing him.

Later, when King Virat learnt that Vrihannala and the other four brothers, serving as his servants incognito were none other than five Pandava princes, he offered his daughter, Uttara as the bride of Arjuna, but Arjuna declined the offer by saying "I have spent a year in your harem by observing celibacy, but I have spent so many days with your daughter as a teacher in public and in privacy. Hence, people may cast aspersions on the character of Uttara and myself. I may, however, accept your daughter as the bride of my son, Abhimanyu." Ultimately Uttara was married to Abhimanyu with due pomp and splendour.

5. Consorts of Arjuna :

In the exemplary character of Prince Arjuna, critics have discovered some black spots in his polygamy, for he had five consorts, viz., Draupadi, Subhadra, Chitrangada, Pramila and Ulupi. But they forget that Arjuna was a prince of a royal dynasty in an age of polygamy and occasional polyandry. Arjuna was neither a mendicant nor a Brahmin by caste. He won Draupadi in an open *swayambara* by defeating all other aspirants, eloped with Subhadra, the sister of Krishna, on the advice of Krishna, as the eldest brother Balaram wanted Subhadra to be married to Duryodhana, and had *gandharva* marriage with Chitrangada, Pramila and Ulupi, during his periods of sojourn, as per convention of the age for Kshatriya princes. The above three temporary marriages, at the insistence of the other party, have to be viewed in the total background of Arjuna's ideal character.



DURYODHANA

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Of the great national epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, it is in the latter that the story is painted on a vast canvas with variegated colours whereas the former has a restricted scope. In the Ramayana the poet deals with ethics and ideal human conduct as it ought to be, and contrasts it with the conduct of characters with their weaknesses. The Ramayana concerns itself with depicting the supremacy of Truth and triumph of Dharma in a violent conflict of emotions.

In the Mahabharata, on the other hand, the idealism depicted is not of the same standard as in the Ramayana and we are made to conclude that in an unrighteous war means adopted need not necessarily be righteous. The end justifies the means though even here the Lord himself guides the destinies of the combatants, he himself remaining a non-combatant. The concept of Dharma gets an elaboration unprecedented and we are given an opportunity to understand the workings of Dharma in various intriguing situations. In the Ramayana all good forces are gathered on one side and all the evil forces on the other, whereas in the Mahabharata we find great heroes and righteous people like Bhishma in the opposite camp. The development of Ramayana hinges on the sanctity of the right of *Primogeniture*. In the Mahabharata this right is no longer sacrosanct and we have the doctrine of selecting the "right person" for the throne practised in preference. We have also the voluntary abdication of the throne by Bhishma. Duryodhana's voice is powerfully raised against this apparent injustice. His character is not entirely villainous considering the fact that gods from above rained flowers in appreciation of what he said particularly before he died.

If we ignore the later additions to the story of Mahabharata which was known by the names Jaya and Bharata before the additions were made, Duryodhana's character does not appear to be so bad after all. According to modern scholars.

bad omens at the time of his birth, humiliation of Draupadi in the open court etc. are all later additions, made, as the original story gradually developed into its present form. If we want to study the characters painted on the vast canvas of the Mahabharata it is better we go through the present form of the book with all the later additions. The later additions provide incidents like the humiliation of Draupadi which bring into prominence the characters of the heroes against a background of complex situations. Duryodhana seems to be the creature of circumstance. If only his father had not been born blind he would have got the throne. Because of his father's blindness the throne had to go to the 'right person' Pandu and from him to Yudhishthira his eldest son. So a compromise was struck by his father Dhritarashtra and the Pandavas were given half the kingdom. But Duryodhana was burning with jealousy. Both the five Pandavas and the one hundred Kauravas learnt their arts together under the famous teacher of archery—Dronacharya. Arjuna excelled all others in archery. Bhima had enormous physical strength. Duryodhana practised wielding the mace (gada) so hard that he excelled even Bhima in this type of warfare. He became invincible. Bhima could not have killed him observing all the rules of the game. So he had to take resort to a subterfuge. And this he did especially when their common teacher Balarama was looking on and Sri Krishna comes out in justification saying that the sage Maitreya had already cursed Duryodhana that he would die with his thighs broken. Bhima had vowed to break his thighs when Duryodhana had shown them to Draupadi in the open court humiliating her. This vow had to be fulfilled. Moreover, Bhima did not aim his mace below the navel when Duryodhana was standing or moving about but when he fell on him to kill him and Bhima did this in self-defence. These are the arguments which were used by Sri Krishna to pacify Balarama who showed his displeasure that Bhima violated the code that the enemy should not be hit below the navel.

This last episode in Duryodhana's life has somehow caught the imagination of the later poets and playwrights and they have depicted Duryodhana in bright colours. Here is what Bhasa the ancient dramatist makes Duryodhana say when his teacher Balarama in righteous indignation declares that he would teach Pandavas a lesson. Duryodhana says, "My brothers are all gone. Bhima has fulfilled his vows. I am myself dying. what use is the killing of Pandavas by you now?" Duryodhana's reviling Sri Krishna in the original epic is appalled by gods for its spirit of

defiance in the true kshatriya-like fashion. In the *Urubhanga* of Bhasa, Duryodhana repents his misdeeds. He is happy that he is dying like a true warrior. He had enjoyed the kingship and all the wealth. He was known for his good administration. Great warriors like Bhishma, Drona and Karna threw their lot with him and died for him. He could not be killed in a straight fight and was killed deceitfully for which eternal fame would be his.

We should remember that it was Duryodhana who chose to fight with Bhima. He could have chosen a lesser man. Duryodhana developed jealousy and hatred for Bhima and could by no means come to terms with him. Bhima could never forget or forgive Duryodhana for this and remembers this even after Duryodhana's death. Duryodhana's magnanimity comes out in the hands of later playwrights when he prevents Balarama from doing any harm to Pandavas by saying that enmity should cease with death. Bhima continues to taunt Dhritarashtra even after Duryodhana's death and the helpless king stops taking food and prepares to leave for the forest with Vidura, Gandhari and Kunti.

Coming to the growth of his hatred towards Pandavas we find that Rajasuya sacrifice performed with all grandeur by Yudhisthira was the starting point. Yudhisthira's fame, his wealth displayed during the sacrifice, the loyalty of a vast number of princes shown to him caused untold jealousy in the proud Duryodhana's heart. The wonderful palace built by the superhuman architect which had many deceptive appearances and which were not familiar to Duryodhana, caused him embarrassment and made him the laughing stock of Draupadi. This added fuel to fire. Now Duryodhana is dead set to take his revenge.

Dhritarashtra is blind in his affection for his son. He tries to advise him but in the end yields. Bhishma is indifferent. His vow is to protect the King of Hastinapura whoever he is at all costs. Vidura is helpless. Gandhari is ineffective in restraining her son. Yudhisthira's peaceful nature and his inordinate desire for striking a compromise by avoiding war do not speak well of his Kshatra dharma and this only whets the appetite of Duryodhana who wanted the whole kingdom and was not prepared to compromise on it. To preserve the family peace both Dhritarashtra and Dharmaputra wanted the land to be partitioned. Duryodhana puts up with his father's gift of Varanavata to the Pandavas because it did not seriously affect his sovereignty. After all it was only a barren piece of land. But advised by Sri Krishna, the Pandavas developed it into the grand city of Indraprastha.

Two courses were open to Duryodhana to claim the entire kingdom. He could follow Karna's advice to fight with the Pandavas and regain the lost portion

of the kingdom or he could adopt Sakuni's strategy of tricking his cousins out of the land. Both were included in Rajadharma. Moreover, Yudhisthira liked the game of dice. If a gory war could be avoided through trickery, why not try especially when the other party willingly participated subterfuge and toppling have been recognised political weapons from ancient times. It may not be ethics. It is politics. The dice game was a clever stratagem that postponed the war and restored the entire kingdom to Duryodhana. According to some, there was only one dice game and Draupadi's humiliation is a later interpolation. Even here veterans like Bhishma sit silently watching saying that the rules of dharma are subtle to understand and Duryodhana seems to have observed the letter of the law though not its spirit.

He did not have the virtues of magnanimity and forgiveness. According to him it is these qualities that ill suited a king. According to Yudhisthira these two alone were kindly virtues. Applying this yardstick Yudhisthira was certainly a greater king. Duryodhana frankly says that he knew Dharma but was not inclined to follow it. He knew what was adharma but did not want to avoid it. After all some God within him was guiding him.

Now let us go through the narrative and find how consistently obdurate Duryodhana is. The reason for this obduracy and blind hatred is that he had to hear constantly people saying that Yudhisthira alone should be crowned as king. Now evil begets evil and perpetuates evil. It even smothers good. It produces a chain reaction. Duryodhana did not look back. He went on and on with his designs. His arrogance and hatred grew stronger. We try to justify all this by saying that it was pure Kshatriya dharma that Duryodhana followed. A Kshatriya fights and does not beg. It is only a Brahman who wants peace at any cost. But it is also true that great kings were also great statesmen and avoidable wars were never fought. If we apply this principle Duryodhana appears in poor light. But it is also strange that a large number of kings took his side. It is difficult to say if this was due to his popularity. May be he approached the kings before the Pandavas could think of it. Kshatriya code of conduct demanded that one should take the side of the king who approached him first. Duryodhana planned for war, whereas the Pandavas planned for peace.

Now tracing his obduracy through the narrative we find that Duryodhana plans to kill Bhima because he was afraid of Bhima's strength even during their student days. He poisoned his food and threw him into water when he was asleep.

The poison strangely increases the strength of Bhim. Ultimately, Yudhisthira is made the heir-apparent. Duryodhana is unhappy. Kanika who was a minister of Sakuni and an adept in the science of administration advises Duryodhan as to how a king should treat his powerful relatives quoting Sukra niti. In essence, this is the philosophy of administration with an iron hand. He complains to his father. His father protests but yields in the end and decides to send Pandavas to Varanavata. A lac palace was constructed there for their stay. Some arrangements were made to make the Pandavas agree to stay in the palace and one day to set fire to it so that it could be said that they died in an accidental fire. Vidura leaks this secret to the Pandavas and they are saved by the efforts of Bhima. This ultimately led to their alliance with the powerful king Drupada. This again increases the jealousy of Duryodhana. He had to accept the advice of Bhishma and others and the Pandavas were taken back and given half the kingdom and they built their capital Indraprastha. According to Bhishma, Drona, Vidura and others who advise Duryodhana many times in the narrative Pandavas were legally entitled to the kingdom. Therefore, it was for Duryodhana to make peace with them by giving them half the kingdom and earn everlasting fame as a just king. This is just, moral, statesman-like and will permanently establish peace.

When Yudhisthira successfully completed the Rajasuya sacrifice Duryodhana frankly confesses to his father that he was burning with jealousy at Pandavas' fame. It was then that Sakuni tells Duryodhana of Yudhisthira's weakness for the dice-game and his own mastery over the game. Vidura and even Dhritarashtra advise him against playing the dice, but to no effect. When Draupadi was humiliated Vikarna, Duryodhana's younger brother, protested. Even then Duryodhana did no relent.

Vyasa brings the sage Maitreya to advise Duryodhana. Duryodhana disregards Maitreya and laughs at him in derision. Maitreya curses him that his thighs would be broken in the battle. Dhritarashtra implores that he should take back the curse. Maitreya replies that the curse will become ineffective only if Duryodhana gives up his evil ways. Duryodhana was constantly thinking of humiliating Pandavas even when they were in the forest. He goes there on the pretext of protecting his cows from wild animals. He wanted to gloat over the sufferings of his cousins. He wanted to show off his own prosperity. This was a mean act. He had to fight with the gandharvas and is taken prisoner by their king. All the people who had followed Duryodhana to the forest go to Dharmaraja and plead with him for saving Duryodhana and the ladies of the palace. Yudhisthira tells his brothers to go and

fight with the gandharvas and free Duryodhana. A terrible fight ensues. Bhima reluctantly fights but wins with the help of Arjuna. Duryodhana is freed and Yudhisthira advises him not to be rash in future. Any one in his position would have been grateful for the kindness and magnanimity shown by those whom he had treated with harshness and cruelty. But Duryodhana's hatred is increased.

He starts *Prayopavesa*—fasting unto death. Somehow he understands that he could gain victory over the Pandavas. He was advised to perform Rajasuya sacrifice just as Yudhisthira did and earn fame. But he could not do it as long as Yudhisthira was alive as he was a claimant to the throne and he could not be vanquished in a battle. So he was advised to perform Vaishnava sacrifice. He performs the sacrifice and regains his composure. He was generous in making gifts and made people happy.

Now he desires to catch and recognise Pandavas when they were living incognito. He is not successful. He suspects that they could be in Virata's city and thinks of marching on Virata's kingdom and seized the cattle. Arjuna routs his forces. Duryodhana is humiliated and returns. He starts saying that Pandavas were recognised before they completed one year of living incognito. Bhishma is convinced that the righteous Pandavas had completed according to the wager their entire period of living in the forest and incognito.

The Pandavas send Sri Krishna on a peacemaking mission. Once again every one, Dhritarashtra, Gandhari, Bhishma, Drona, Vidura and Sri Krishna advise Duryodhana to make peace. But he is adamant. He tries to make treaties with various Kings and succeeds in getting a very large army on his side. He is determined in not giving a needle point of land to his cousins. War starts. One by one great heroes fall. Still Duryodhana goes on and ultimately he tries to hide in a lake. It is the peace-loving Dharmaraja that finds out the place and taunts Duryodhana for his cowardice and makes him come out and accept the challenge as a true Kshatriya. Magnanimously he gives him the choice of the weapon and the person with whom to fight. Duryodhana rises to the occasion and like a true Kshatriya chooses his equal Bhima and the weapon Gada. He dies a valiant death. But his making Aswatthama the Commander-in-chief and expressing happiness when the nefarious act of Aswatthama's killing Drishtadyumna and other warriors in their sleep is reported to him are not in true Kshatriya spirit.

Thus we see throughout the epic that the two groups led by two powerful personalities are coming into conflict on the question of upholding *Dharma*

understood by each according to his own light. Throughout the epic Duryodhana is advised by many persons, Sri Krishna and Bhishma to Sanjaya and Vidura. These discussions help us to understand the subtleties of *Dharma* and tell us how to face such conflicts and challenges. The groups are powerful numerically and qualitatively. The basic question discussed repeatedly still eludes a solution. Duryodhana gets repeated set-backs in his adventures. He does not give up. Yudhishthira suffers untold miseries but is still after peace. Almost every one takes the side of Yudhishthira in pleading with Duryodhana for half the kingdom and yet we find a large number of great kings with their armies take the side of Duryodhana in the war. We are not convinced that Duryodhana was right in what he did. Sukraniti seems to support him as we understand from Kanika's statement. Brihaspati Niti does not support him as we understand from the advice of Bhishma and others. He is prepared to adopt any strategy to force a consent from his father. Still we admire his doggedness in pursuing his goals and the way he marshals all forces on his side in spite of his not being equal to Yudhishthira in virtue. Sri Krishna, Yudhishthira and others who were pillars of *Dharma* had to reckon with one Duryodhana and even when the war was won there were not many to enjoy its fruit. Minds continue to be bitter with the haunting memories of fratricidal war. All said and done, there is a charm in Duryodhana. The very last fight he fought like a true Kshatriya brought him glory and appears to win the admiration of all those who study the epic and all the evil that Duryodhana was responsible for seems to have been erased from the mind of the reader. In Sri Aurobindo's words, Vyasa was a Titan. His depiction of the villain of the piece is so splendid and so vast in its conception that it puts to shade the depiction of Ravana by Valmiki even though there is some change in the attitudes of people between *Treta* and *Dwapara*. Duryodhana was simply great even as a wicked person and he pursued relentlessly what he thought was the right path for him.



KARNA

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Time (Kāla) and Action (Karma) perhaps ordain everything in this Universe.
The devout saint Tulasidas said :—

Janamamaranasava Sukhadukhabhogā
Hāni labhu priyamilana viyogā
Kāla Karamavaśa Hoi Gosāin
Varavas rāti divasa ki nāin

Ramacharitamānasa-Ayodhyakanda SI. 149 (3)

Life and death, joy and sorrow, gains and loss, loving union and separation—these all happen lying under the control of time and action like the rolling of days and nights. But action depends on Time and so Time stands supreme.

This Time again always moves along a predetermined route. The sage Valmiki remarks :

Pūrvanīramāṇavaddhā hi kālasya gatiṛdṛśī

Ramayana/Uttara Kanda 106/2

i.e. Time treads the Path it prepares. While Rama was worried in the event of declaring the royal order of banishment to his dear brother Lakṣmana, the latter in a bid to console the former made this statement. So it seems that everything depends on the will of time. The epic Mahabharata reveals that the sage Vyasa was fully aware of it. In this epic Lord Kṛṣṇa once declares :

Kālosmi lokakṣaya kṛt pravṛddhaḥ.

Geeta—11.32

i.e. I am the great (Pravṛddha) Time (Kāla) i.e., eternity, the destroyer of the world, and also as

‘Aham evākṣayo Kāla’

Geeta—10.33

i.e., I am the Time undecaying. He wanted Arjuna to be merely his agent (nimitta mātram bhava savyasāchin—Geeta. 11.33) in his deed. Certainly this

indicates the supremacy of Time over all which ordains everything unnoticed. Lord Kṛṣṇa seems to be the soul of the epic Mahabharata. Indeed if the epic of the sage Valmiki is called Ramayana, then the epic of the sage Vyasa may equally be called Kṛṣṇāyana, which practically euologises Kṛṣṇa like Rama in the former the Poet says—

Bhagavan Vasudevaśca Kirtyatetra sanātanah :

(Maha-Ādi 1/256)

Why then is the epic called Mahabharata instead of Kṛṣṇāyana ? In two instances the sage comments on the title of the epic. The epic is so named, firstly, because it surpasses all the Vedas by its volume and weight (Mahattvāt Bhāravattvachcha Mahabharatamuchyate)

(Maha—Ādi—1/275)

and secondly it narrates the birth-history of the Bharata kings.

Bharatānam mahadjanma tasmād bhāratamuchyate

(Maha—Svargā—5/45)

It may be noted that the epic was known both as Mahabharata and Bharata. Sometimes it is also called the fifth Veda. (Maha—Ādi—63/89). However, of all the names the name Mahabharata was most popular. Our country is named after the king Bharata, and the great India as the history of the Bharatas, people of this land, appear self-projecting in this epic.

No less significant is the word Bharata, which reminds one the culture of ancient India. It occurs in the Rg. Veda (Viśvāmitrasya Brahmedam rakṣati bhāratam janam—Rv. 3.53.12). It is also a synonym of the word R̥twik¹, the Vedic priests, who were well-versed in the science of Vedic sacrifice. The sacrifice was the centre of the Vedic culture, which was dependent on the study of time. The study of the Vedas reveals that there was no such temporal unit which was not experimented on sacrifice in early times.

The idea reached its climax in the hymn known as Purusasukta (Rv. 10.90). The seers of this hymn were both Nara and Narayana. It is said in the Mahabharata that those seers reappeared again as Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna.

(Maha—Vana 12.46)

Thus owing to the sacred nature of the word it was chosen as the name of the king and ultimately appeared to be the name of this country, the mother land of

(1) Nighantu—3.18 4

the poet also. But it is not only the sage's love for his motherland, but his striking association with the line of the king Bharata initiated him in keeping on record the history of his own family. One may remember how once Vyasa responded to his mother's call as promised earlier and it so happened that he had to become the father of three children named Dhritarastra, Pandu and Vidura. Thus Vyasa, who was also known as Veda-Vyasa for his stupendous achievement of dividing the Veda into four parts, composed his fifth Veda in the form of this epic highlighting the same tradition, the story of the Bharatas. Thus, this epic is nothing but the great India itself. While studying the Mahabharata, irrespective of its event, situation, character or whatever may be the fact, one invariably is required to be aware of the background of the epic for the attainment of proper judgement of the same.

Let us now consider the character of Karna, the first-son of virgin Kunti as well as the first-Pandava, known also as Basukarna and Vikartana.

Curious enough was the story of his birth. Kunti in order to test the validity of the boon offered to her by the sage Durvāsas invoked the sun who bestowed her the son, Karna. Overwhelmed by the situation, she decided to desert her son out of sheer bashfulness. Karna thus a destitute, was deprived of motherly affection and all sorts of care, a Kshatriya deserves from the very beginning. Although there was mother's will, yet it was not so much as to get a child as to test the potency of the boon offered to Kunti by the sage Durvāsas. It appears that the Sun merely acted according to the sage's word. Of course, the sun-god incidentally offered his own blessings also to the child. Karna thus inherited the characteristic qualities from both the sun and the sage.

He was as it were a born-warrior, born with an armour and an ear ring by the grace of the sun. He was strong, resolute and handsome-looking also. He was determined to earn mastery in the war-craft, and caring little for his difficulties served his preceptor Paraśurāma and obtained from him the bow named '*Vijaya*'. He did not respond to Kṛṣṇa's call to join the Pandavas and till the end was loyal to Duryodhana. Really he was a great warrior. Once Kṛṣṇa cautioned Arjuna admitting Karna's superiority in might as well as in the skill of warfare¹. Had there not been the advice of Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna at the right moment it would have been rather difficult for him to kill Karna.

The other side of his character reveals that Karna was noble. He was a

1. Tvatsamam tvat visistam va manye Karnam maharatham,
Maha—Karna—72/25

devotee to the Sun-god, and was famous for his charity and hospitality. Once he did not hesitate to sacrifice his son or to offer even his armour and ear ring caring little for his protection to a guest, Indra in disguise. Of course, for this act of his greatest ever charity Indra presented him an arrow capable of killing one (Akāghnī). Karna wanted to kill Arjuna by this weapon but he could not utilise the same against his target due to Kṛṣṇa's manoeuver.

Time and Action control the life of Karna from the very beginning. Indeed when Karna confronts Arjuna in the battle of Kuruksetra, one may well see in it the fight not between a Pandava and a Kaurava but actually between a Pandava and a Pandava. Had there been six Pandavas including Karna in one camp opposing the Kauravas, then the history would be otherwise. Being a victim of situations a Pandava had to act like a Kaurava. Karna had to fight against different adverse situations from the beginning of his life. It appears that the forces against him were active enough to curb his strength. Cursed by a Brahmin he found the wheel of his chariot eclipsed by the Earth during the battle. Thanks to the curse of his preceptor, he failed to remember in time the application of the Brahmastra, the most powerful weapon. Not to speak of Indra who deprived him of his armour and ear ring earlier. Moreover, the charioteer Salya even, went against him who instead of driving the chariot carefully indulged in bickerings with Karna in the battle. As a victim of situations Karna arouses the reader's sympathy.

However, Lord Kṛṣṇa while declaring his divine qualities announced himself as Dhananjaya among the Pandavas but it is remarkable that he said nothing about who he was among the Kauravas. Of course prior to this Kṛṣṇa declares himself as 'Jaya', the victory of war and as *Vyavasaya*¹ i. e., the war itself. Although it was Arjuna who ultimately brought victory in the Kuruksetra-battle it was with Karna in whom the battle reached its zenith.

While concluding one can well echo an oft-quoted line 'Na cha daivāt param valam' i.e., nothing overtakes the Divine power. This Divine power is revealed in Action and is manifest in Time, this precisely is what makes the character of Karna as transparent as sunlight.

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SRI KRISHNA—THE DIVINE BEING

SWAMI MAHANANDA

Ramakrishna Mission

Every historical era in the span of Time has some sort of miracle and the miracle of the Mahabharata-era is the advent of Sri Krishna. His manly and masterly movements in the pages of the Mahabharata, the Harivansa and the nine puranas are simply marvellous. These puranas wherein are depicted the life and character of Sri Krishna are Bhagavata purana, Brahma Purana, Padma Purana, Vishnu Purana, Vayu Purana, Brahma-vaivarta Purana, Scanda Purana, Vamana Purana and Kurma Purana. In the entire gigantic epic of the Mahabharata, Krishna stands out in an aura of lustrous brilliance and greatness. His divine gait and glory can well be ascertained from his very birth. His subsequent performances of various deeds during even his tender age make one admirably stirred. Events, episodes of his early life have been brightly painted in the Bhagavatam. Sister Nivedita writes about his early life :

Kamsa was a very tyrant king of Mathura. This Kamsa had a great love for his sister Devaki and her husband Vasudev. When the wedding between Devaki and Vasudev was over, Kamsa himself acted as a driver of the chariot taking the couple, as it was wont, to the house of Vasudev. On the way, however, an unseen voice spoke to them from heaven saying—"the eighth child of this couple whom you are joyfully driving now, shall be your killer, oh Kamsa". At this, Kamsa's love for the couple turned to hatred. Kamsa at once went to kill Devaki with his sword drawn from scabbard. Vasudev could, anyhow, prevent it, but he had to promise to hand over all their issues to Kamsa as soon as they were born. Kamsa felt the reason and agreed to the proposal of Vasudev. But later, the couple was thrown into the dark dungeon under his palace—bound hand and foot with iron chains. They were thus troubled in their hearts but as promised by Vasudev, Kamsa was given one by one, the six children born in prison. Kamsa killed them all. No solace this unhappy couple knew but their hearts were pure as snow.

At last the cloud of misery vanished. Krishna, their eighth child, appeared before them in the middle of night, healing the wounds of their hearts with beningly divine smiles. That divine child said—"Father and Mother weep no more. I have

come to rescue you and also for the deliverance of the good. Take me, this newly born child of yours and leave him in the house of Nanda, by the side of sleeping Yasoda. The place is on the other side of the river Yamuna in the village of Gokula. Also bring hither the girl child born to Yasoda in exchange and make her lie by the side of Devaki. As directed, Vasudev lifted the tender baby, pressed upon his bosom and went outside, as if in a dream. The iron bolts of the door slid back, locks turned loose automatically, the chains fastened to his legs fell softly and the guards slumbered heavily. Vasudev with the newly born Sri Krishna passed into the open road and then through heavy storm and rains, crossed the Yamuna by divine grace and soon reached Nanda's palace in Gokul. There too, the closed doors opened before him, and in a room he saw the sleeping mother Yasoda, and her newborn baby. Vasudev bent down, exchanged the children and returned back to the prison in Mathura. That female child of Yasoda was placed by the side of his own wife, Devaki".

"Early in the morning all at Gokula came to know that a beautiful prince had been born the previous night to Nanda, their king and their simple hearts were filled up with unbounded joy. They hurried to see their king and congratulate him on this joyful occasion, carrying on their shoulders their presents of curd, butter and condensed milk. As soon as they saw Nanda, they began to dance in joy. . . and sang in chorus the praises of God. (Swami Ramakrishnananda's book—Sri Krishna the pastoral and King maker). Kamsa, hearing this news tried in very many ways to kill the young child. Such incidents have been mentioned in the puranas. But Sri Krishna was God incarnate with a mission and he could not be killed. He was, as a result, looked upon by all inhabitants of Gokula as a Divine Being. "Once upon a time his mother wanted to examine his mouth to see whether he had swallowed some earth or not, and as soon as he opened his mouth, she saw the whole universe contained in his mouth. At one time he was very naughty and Yasoda wanted to bind him with a rope; she exhausted all the ropes but her child could not be bound." (Swami Ramakrishnananda). The anecdotes, stories and episodes of the cowherd lad of Vrindavan are charming and portray his love, valour, vitality and wisdom. "But Yasoda and Nanda regarded him as their sweet darling, the shepherd boys as their own sweet companion and friend, the young shepherd girls could not help regarding him as their own beloved, the sages, who knew him to be an incarnation of God, regarded him as their Master, while some others, knowing his inner self to be beyond the reach of all of activities gained eternal peace in him. Blessed were indeed the inhabitants of Vrindavan who had such an easily reachable God among them !" (Swami Ramakrishnananda).

Sri Krishna lived in Vrindavan for some time more, killing still some other demons sent by Kamsa, till the latter invited him so that he could ultimately kill him. Akrura brought him to Mathura in a chariot. He took bath in Yamuna. He rose no more. In his place came up Sri Krishna, the defender of the Vedas, the greatest statesman, the most serious and practical philosopher. Akrura had told him the full purpose of the demonical Kamsa. Kamsa tried to get him killed by the most ferocious elephant, by his wrestlers but they were all killed by Krishna. Krishna then sprang upon the dais where Kamsa was sitting upon his throne and catching him by his hair, brought him down to the arena and in a moment killed him. When the tyrant was thus killed, peace was restored. Sri Krishna brought his father and mother, Vasudeva and Devaki, and installed the aged Ugrasena, father of Kamsa, on the throne. The scene changes. Sri Krishna moves on the bigger stage—Hastinapur, Kurukshetra and so on.

The events and incidents in Sri Krishna's life are many. Those are narrated in the Bhagavata purana and other puranas and in the Mahabharata and Harivansa. Very many incidents in Sri Krishna's life appear as supernatural. He appears as a paradox. "He is not like us, living in a dull, dead and material world. We even fail to gauge the extent of his knowledge even if we try. We should, therefore, always reserve our judgments regarding these Incarnations, if we do not want to be rash." Sri Krishna was a towering personality, rich in mental and spiritual attainments. He shares the life of those around him, enters into their joys and sorrows, and also rejoices with them. Through it all, he never forgets who he is, whence he came or what was the purpose of his coming, that is, he never forgets his divinity. He knows that he was long before Creation and Time and he remembers always that he is always his great, glorious and majestic self. But in the human form, Sri Krishna plays the role of a lover, a king maker and Supreme Lord.

Some slokas in the Gita have contributed to the "making of a history of philosophy, while there have been many others which have been the expression of exhortation of doing one's duty well. Sri Krishna teaches Bhakti which means the tremendous clinging to God and this Bhakti is the strongest influence which goes in the shaping of the lives and actions of the Hindus. Bhakti is a sacred series of succession of joyful mental efforts at realization, beginning with the ordinary day-to-day worship of God and then in a state of supreme and sublime intensity of love for the **Iswara**. For this, discipline and purity of mind and love for **Iswara** are

the absolute necessity. The blissful madness of divine love alone can certainly cure for ever the dire disease of the world that is lurking in us as bondage. This expression of philosophy and teaching we come across in the Bhagavata and other puranas depicting at the same time, the life and personality of Sri Krishna.

Swami Vivekananda said : Every thing goes to show that this philosophy must be very practical and later on when we come to the Bhagavad Gita most of you, perhaps, have read it, it is the best commentary, we have on the Vedanta philosophy. Curiously enough the scene is laid on the battle field where Krishna teaches this philosophy to Arjuna. The doctrine which stands out luminously in every page of the Gita, is intense activity, but in the midst of it, eternal calmness. This is the secret of work, to attain which is the goal of Vedanta.Real activity which is the goal of Vedanta, is combined with eternal calmness, the calmness which cannot be ruffled, the balance of mind which is never disturbed, whatever happens.... That is the best attitude for work."

Now a bit about the antiquity of Sri Krishna. We find the name of Krishna in the Chandogya Upanishad. There Krishna's teacher was Ghora Angiraso but Krishna of the Mahabharata and the Puranas had Sandipani and Garga as the teachers. Many hold the view that Vasudeva, the Yadava hero, the cowherd boy Krishna in the village Gokula, the counsellor of the Pandavas in the Mahabharata and also the great philosopher of the Bhagavat Gita, or in short, Krishna of the Puranas, and Krishna of the Mahabharata was one and the same person (Ref : the History and Culture of the Indian People, Vol. I, page 303). A. D. Pusalkar, the famous historian denies the identity of Krishna of the Upanishad with Krishna of the Mahabharata (Refer : Studies in Epics and Puranas of India, 'pp 57-58).

Sri Krishna was the God of Infinite Love and the object of Love, sublime and infinite. The beautiful eyes of Sri Krishna suggest all the time a calm and amused detachment of spirit. He was always for great and grand values. He was always ready to devote himself, body and soul, to a great cause with his fearless spirit. The philosophy and religion, he preached through his life and sayings—non-attachmant, purusottambad, love that transcends body and mind, is infinitely intense and illumines our path to the great Goal. Through the ages He is inspiring millions of people to attain Him who radiates brilliant lusture and light and bestows blessedness and intense calmness.

SRI KRISHNA—THE MAN, THE LEGEND AND THE IDEAL

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(Adopted from his book "Profiles In Greatness"
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It would be no exaggeration at all to describe Sri Krishna as that unique personality, power and phenomenon which has exercised a profound influence on the Indian people over thousands of years, an influence which has been most pervasive, positive and potent. The Sanskrit root-verb '*Karsh*' means 'to pull or draw to oneself.' When derived from this, 'Krishna' connotes one with that power, and from all accounts we have of him, he was a veritable 'divine magnet' who irresistibly attracted to himself all created beings—men, women and children, saints and sinners, scholars and the unlettered, royalty and common folk.

Both illumined sages and innocent devotees have adored Krishna as the ideal of all that is good and great, noble and beautiful. He has been considered the most perfect manifestation of divinity on earth.¹ But there have also been critics, both Westerners and their Indian counterparts, who consider him just a product of the infantile imagination of a people who possess neither lofty intellect nor high ethical standards.

Notwithstanding the opinions of such critics. Krishna remains and prospers as a continual power, a living and wholesome ideal illuminating the minds, inspiring the hearts and moulding the lives of millions of good, worthy and intelligent people. They find themselves elevated and enriched by the light, love and joy radiating from their great teacher who is also *Madhava* the embodiment of sweetness and bliss². Sri Krishna is not merely the great lover, but equally the great hero, the great *yogi* and the supreme *Guru* for aspiring and adoring humanity.

The two important classics which, among others, deal with Krishna are the Mahabharata, of which the Bhagavad-Gita is a part, and the Srimad Bhagavatam,

both in Sanskrit. Much of the criticism against Krishna centres mainly round two aspects, first, his dealing with specially the Gopis of Vrindavan; and secondly, the 'questionable' means or tactics he employs or advocates to help his proteges, the Pandavas, to destroy their enemies.

Much of the criticism is also due to the failure of the critics to understand and appreciate the fact that the Bhagavatam is intended to attract all varieties of people to God and spiritual life. That is done through glorification and presentation of divine love in its various aspects; this purifies the hearts and minds of the readers or hearers and finally leads them on to the highest truth, which is also simultaneously highest love and bliss, of which Krishna is the supreme embodiment. The Bhagavatam is a combination of exquisite poetry, sublime philosophical ideas and captivating mythology. Its appeal and operation are primarily through the heart. It is intended for and succeeds in, capturing the heart and imagination. The very Gopi-episode, which self-appointed critics deprecate, has inspired and exalted some of our purest and noblest men of god, especially the Vaishnavite saints. Even in modern days Sri Ramakrishna, the purest of the pure, who could not bear the slightest touch of sensuality, would often fall into Samadhi whenever he heard or thought of the Gopis. To him the devotion of the Gopis was the devotion of love, constant, unmixed, unflinching. His worthy disciple Swami Vivekananda, a paragon of renouncers, considered the Gopi-Lila as the acme of the religion of love. Swami Vivekananda makes the issue clear in telling words in his lecture on the 'Sages of India':

"Ah, that most marvellous passage of his (Krishna's) life the most difficult to understand, and which none ought to attempt to understand until he has become perfectly chaste and pure, that most marvellous expansion of love, allegorised and expressed in that beautiful play at Vrindavan, which none can understand but he who has become mad with love....³

Now let us consider the role of Sri Krishna in the epic Mahabharata.

In regard to the so-called questionable, unethical, steps taken by Sri Krishna in the Mahabharata war on behalf of Pandavas, it is no new discovery of the critics. The author has deliberately highlighted them in the epic itself, and that not once, while at the same time unflinchingly continuing to delineate Sri Krishna as the great Man and Avatara. There must certainly be some purpose and design behind this apparent paradox. The author himself brings out, through the words of various characters, a stronger attack of Sri Krishna than any external critic could perhaps

hope to make. Typical of them is that of Duryodhana who, after being struck down by Bhima in single combat, denounces Sri Krishna, detailing his charges :

“Wretch ! Son of a slave ! I saw you instigate Bhima to aim his blow at my thigh . . . disregarding the laws of single combat. You have neither pity nor shame. Did you not contrive the death of the grandsire Bhishma through stratagem ? . . . You brought about the end of Dronacharya through making Dharmputra utter a falsehood. You were the father of that deadly lie that issued from Yudhisthira’s mouth . . . Did you not look on without protest, and rejoice, when that wretch Dhrishtadyumna attacked and killed the Acharya, who had stopped fighting, throwing away his weapons, and settled down in yoga posture for meditation on the Supreme ? Was it not you who wickedly contrived to make Karna hurl the fatal spear at Ghatotkacha instead of reserving it for Arjuna as he had all along resolved to do ? . . . It was you who brought about the death of Karna by inducing Arjuna to attack him in a cowardly manner when he was engaged in lifting his chariot wheel which had sank and stuck in the mud in the field of battle. O worthless man, sole cause of our destruction, the whole world has condemned your act when by sorcery, you made it appear as if the sun had set and made Jayadratha, the Sindhu King, believe that the day was over and he was past danger, and thus he was slain when he was off his guard.”⁴

Sri Krishna’s calm and cool reply gives the key to his thinking and outlook :

“Son of Gandhari, why do you let your anger add to the pain of your last moments ? It is your own misdeeds that have brought about end. Do not attribute it to me. So also were you the cause of death of Karna and others. Need I recount all the wrongs that you were guilty of against the sons of Pandu ? What punishment can be too severe for the great outrage which you inflicted on Draupadi ? The animosities and passions that resulted from your misdeeds cannot be made a ground for condemning others. All the deceptions and lapses you charge us with were forced on us by reason of your wicked conduct. You have paid off on the battlefield the debt incurred by your greed. But you are dying the death of a brave man. You will go to the happy regions reserved for kshatriyas who lay down their lives on the field of battle.”⁵

Duryodhana continues unrepentant and defiant and speaks as if his is the more glorious lot. Sri Krishna then points out to the Pandavas that Duryodhana could not have been defeated by conventional means in war, and so other means had to be adopted to meet the needs of true justice, Dharma. Dharma has to be protected and preserved since it is the very basis of life.

At all times, the reader of the Mahabharata has to remember the basic and repeated thesis of the epic—that where there is Dharma or basic righteousness, invariably there is victory, and where there is Krishna there is inevitably Dharma.⁶

In spite of certain inevitable human weaknesses and errors of judgement, the Pandavas are basically righteous. They are intent on truth and virtue, striving consciously to practise Dharma, God-fearing, self-controlled, compassionate and generous and ever open to correction, advice and instruction. They are fallible but not wicked.

There is no question as to the Kauravas being the wanton aggressors, with Duryodhana as their leader. He is basically proud and arrogant, greedy and cruel and above all, jealous of his cousins. He and his henchmen contrive a rigged game of dice to lure and deprive the Pandavas of all their possessions and exile them. When still they survive and come back and ask for a minimum fair share of the Kingdom, Duryodhana refuses to give them even a pinpoint of land. All wiser people realize the injustice and plead with him to relent and take to the path. But Duryodhana is obstinate, blind with pride and passion, and precipitates the war, sure of victory, depending on his own military might, material resources, cunning and allies.

We find that the life and actions of the Pandavas are primarily centred on truth and righteousness (Satya and Dharma), guided by self-control, generosity and compassion (Dama and Daya), even though extreme circumstances compel them to resort to a few white lies and breaches of conventional laws regarding warfare or social conduct. About this they themselves are not happy. On the other hand, Duryodhana and his followers are mad after power and possessions, wilfully and unrepentantly resorting to the most foul means to fulfil their ambitions.

But the ends of true justice must be served and Krishna sees to it that this is done. Men may be misled by, or misjudge, the externals. But God or His Incarnation sees the whole. He has to protect Dharma and its votaries and punish those who dare to flout it with impunity. Krishna sees that this is done. For the purpose he knowingly supports and guides the Pandavas, even when they have to resort to certain breaches of technical rules or conventional morality. And he is ever alert and active to see that the wanton aggressors do not get away with their ill-begotten gains and glory, however capable and clever they may otherwise be.

Bhishma is great indeed, a towering colossus, whom all revere, specially the

Pandavas. But certain considerations of polity make him lead the fight on the side of the Kauravas, the side of basic Adharma. He has to pay the price.

Drona is the great Acharya who taught archery to both the Pandavas and Kauravas, and Arjuna is his favourite disciple. Yet he gives his services to the wrong side, on the basis of certain traditional loyalties. He has to pay the price. Though a Brahmin, he departs from brahminic virtues such as non-killing and takes up arms. He invites violence.

Karna is tragically great, renowned for his generosity and noble in his own way. He has suffered greatly on account of his extra-marital birth, no fault of his own. But his blind loyalty to Duryodhana, who befriended him, at the cost of other bigger issues and higher values, leads him astray. He proceeds to support Duryodhana indiscriminately, and thereby becomes a party to various wrongs, to Adharma. He, therefore, forfeits his right to talk of Dharma; he, too, has to pay the price.

This is brought home to him on the battle-field when in the thick of battle his chariot gets bogged down and he asks Arjuna for respite till he sets it right, according to the rules of war. Arjuna hesitates. Karna appeals to Arjuna's sense of honour, Kshatriya chivalry. But Krishna intervenes and exclaims :

“Ha, Karna ! It is well that you too remember that there are things like fairplay and chivalry ! Now that you are in difficulty you remember them indeed, but when you and Duryodhana and Duhsasana and Sakuni dragged Draupadi to the Hall of Assembly and insulted her, how was it you forgot them utterly ! You helped to inveigle Dharmaputra, who was fond of dice but unskilled at it, into gambling, and you cheated him. Where had your fairplay hidden itself then ? Was it fair-play to refuse to give to Yudhisthira his kingdom when according to the pledge the twelve years of forest life and thirteenth year incognito were duly completed ? What had happened to the Dharma you appeal for now ? You conspired with the wicked men who sought to poison and kill Bhima. You acquiesced in the plot to burn the Pandavas alive when sleeping in the palace of wax into which they had been lured. What had happened to Dharma all that time ? What did Dharma tell you when violent hands were laid on Draupadi and you were looking on, enjoying the sight ? Did you not then mock at her saying : ‘Your husbands have left you unprotected, go and marry another husband’ ? The tongue, that was not ashamed to utter those words now talks of chivalry. Chivalry indeed !

When a mob of you surrounded the young Abhimanyu and shamelessly slew him, was that chivalry ! Wicked man do not talk now of chivalry and fairplay, for you have never honoured them !”

Karna has to bend his head in shame and cannot utter a word. He has to continue the fight with his physical handicap. Arjuna hesitates but Krishna urges him to go ahead and finish the foe, which is done.

In all these cases, Sri Krishna actively guides, and takes the responsibility. His one and sole purpose is to protect Dharma and the good, virtuous and innocent by all means, even if in the process he is misunderstood, condemned. He is impartial; his partiality is only for the good and virtuous, for the welfare and happiness of all. He does his best to see that justice and fairplay prevail, that there is reconciliation between the cousins, that war is not resorted to.

When, however, war becomes inevitable for protecting Dharma itself, he sees to it that the Pandavas Pursue it vigorously as their Svadharma and come out victorious. Others, who were not earlier so clear about the terrible evils of war and to some extent even gloried in heroic wars, are shocked at the total destruction brought about by the Mahabharata War. But Sri Krishna is calm and detached.

Gandhari, overcome by grief at the loss of all her sons, charges Krishna with being responsible for all the slaughter, and in a fit of rage curses him that a similar fate may overcome him, that he may be a witness to the destruction of his own race who would perish by internecine fighting. Not in the least perturbed by the terrible curse, Sri Krishna asks her not to be overcome by grief and anger, rebuts her charges, and points out that it was all brought upon themselves by their own wicked deeds—which Gandhari also concedes in her cooler moments. As regards her curse, out of regard for an otherwise paragon of womanly virtues, Krishna accepts it and says, “Well, when the Yadavas become proud and wicked they too will meet with destruction, and since there will be none else powerful enough to do it, they will destroy themselves !”

When Uttanka, a brahmin friend, hears from Krishna about the war, he also suddenly loses balance and cries out in wrath, “Vasudeva, were you there standing by and did you let all this happen ? You have indeed failed in your duty. You have surely practised deceit and led them to destruction. Prepare to receive my curse !”

Smilingly, Krishna advises him not to be needlessly excited and not to waste powers in mistaken directions and explains :

"I am born in various bodies from time to time to save the world and establish the good. In whatever body I am born, I must act in conformity with the nature of that body....I do what is natural to that birth and complete my task. I begged hard of the Kauravas. They were arrogant and intoxicated by power and paid no heed to my advice. I tried to intimidate them. Therein also I failed....They persisted in wrong-doing. They waged war and perished."⁸

Hearing this Uttanka recovered his calm. And this should silence all the other critics of Krishna too.

If sublime love be the soul and substance of the Krishna of the Bhagavatam it is comprehensive righteousness or Dharma in Mahabharata. That Dharma is the essence and central purpose of his advent, his life and actions as well as his teachings. This becomes clear by some verses of the Gita :⁹

"For the protection of the good, for the elimination of the wicked and for the establishment of Dharma do I come forth again and again."

"The one saving remedy for all the ills of this imperfect and relative life is to become utterly detached to all actions and their fruits, while yet performing them scrupulously and completely, and take total refuge in the Lord, the only one who is perfectly good and righteous, nay perfection itself. In Him alone one can realize abiding peace and ultimate rest, the Lord who is none other than the Soul of our own soul and who dwells in the heart of each and every one. Do this and you are freed from all sins. Life's greatest privilege and blessing would be to surrender to the Divine thus and then become His worthy and willing instrument for carrying out His purpose. That would be true Dharma, attended by true Victory." (Gist not necessarily in successive order of the verses).

A life full of energy and beneficial activity, faith in oneself and faithfulness to one's own Svadharma, calm and detached performance of duties, unconcerned with profit or loss, pleasure or pain, praise or blame, honour or dishonour—all in the framework of a total surrender to the Divine within, the only Being who is all-pure, all-free and all-perfect. This then is the essence of the life, action and message of Sri Krishna, clear and unfaltering.

The Mahabharata in all its epic grandeur and proportions seeks to present such a Krishna in a dual role. First, he is the ideal man *Adarsa Purusha*, the great exemplar and illustration of his own teachings in the context of various complex

life situations. Then he is also the *Parama Purusha*, 'Supreme Being,' who provides the inspiration and refuge for all. He is the Divine Incarnation. God playing the role of man, and opening up the path for mortals to God.

He is utterly impartial, fair and courteous to all. The Pandavas are taken to task for accepting the call to play dice, which is only gambling and not *dharma*. When his own descendents the Yadavas, become insolent, he promptly sees that they too are eliminated. Finally, at the end of all this when he is mortally struck down by the arrow of a hunter who mistakes him for a deer, even then he reacts neither in panic nor wrath. Instead of cursing the offender, as Gandhari and others did in his own case, he calmly consoles, reassures and blesses him. No wonder that this magnificent marvel that was Krishna, stirs another Krishna-like spirit, namely, Swami Vivekananda, into offering a full-throated tribute :

"He was the most wonderful *sannyasin* and the most wonderful householder in one; he had the most wonderful amount of Rajas, power, and was at the same time living in the midst of the most wonderful renunciation.... Krishna, the preacher of the Gita, was all his life the embodiment of the Song Celestial, he was the great illustration of non-attachment.... A great land-mark in the history of religion.... the ideal of love for love's sake, work for work's sake, duty for duty's sake and for the first time it fell from the lips of the greatest of Incarnations, Krishna, and for the first time in history of humanity, on the soil of India...."¹⁰

"His was the first heart large enough to see truth in all.... In Krishna we find two ideas supreme.... The first is the harmony of different ideals, the second is non-attachment."¹¹

Sri Krishna belongs to the dimension of the unlimited, beyond the understanding of ordinary minds and measure of ordinary standards. Just as in God, the Infinite all contradictions meet and become harmonized, so also they do in Krishna. He is the confluence of the highest expressions of knowledge, love and action, heroism and tenderness, strength and grace, might and humility, splendour and renunciation. In short, he has emerged as the composite ideal of various human aspirations, the fulfilment of the quest for perfection—ethical, aesthetic, spiritual, altruistic—of various hearts and minds.

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In every age I come back to deliver the holy,
To destroy the sin of the sinner,
To establish righteousness.

He who knows the nature
Of my task and my holy birth, is not reborn
When he leaves this body; He comes to Me.

Flying from fear, from lust and anger,
He hides in Me, his refuge and safety.
Burnt clean in the blaze of my being
In Me many find home.

—Bhagavad-Gita

महाभारत की कुन्ती

डॉ० उषा वर्मा

रीडर, हिन्दी विभाग, जगदम कालेज, छपरा

अनेक पात्रों द्वारा अनेक शुभ विशेषणों से विशेषित महाभारत की कुन्ती की सम्पूर्ण जीवन यात्रा पीड़ा से पीड़ा तक की यात्रा है। बीच-बीच में सुख के दो-चार क्षण आये भी हैं तो या तो वे कुन्ती की पीड़ा की गहराई में खो गये हैं या चिर संगिनी सखी पीड़ा से विलगाव का डर कुन्ती को उस सुख को भरपूर भोगने-महसूसने से बचा गया है—या फिर सुख की क्षणभंगुरता को कुन्ती के मन-प्राण इस हद तक जान-समझ गये हैं—कि सामान्य जन की तरह सुख के प्रति आकर्षण अब उसके लिए निरर्थक हो गया है। कारण जो हो, किन्तु, यह निर्विवाद है कि यदुकुल में श्रेष्ठ शूर नामक महात्मा पिता की पुत्री, कुंतिभोज की दत्तक कन्या, वसुदेव की बहन, श्री कृष्ण की फूफी, कौरव कुल की वधू, पाण्डु की पत्नी और पाण्डव की माता होने के गौरव से विभूषित कुन्ती आजीवन दुखिया बनी रही है। प्रारब्ध का कुछ ऐसा विधान रहा है कि उसके लिए दुःख की एक-से-एक विकट बेल अंकुरित होती रही है। उसकी खुशियों को सदैव काँटों का बारा मिला है। दूसरों के लिए जो सुख सामान्य सहज रहा है, कुन्ती के लिए वही अलभ-दुर्लभ होकर रह गया है। विजय के हर शिखर पर कुन्ती को भारी शिकस्त मिली है। उपलब्धि का हर क्षण उसके लिए एक बड़ा अभाव बन कर उभरा है। कहीं उसके साथ नियति ने ठगी की है। कहीं उसे-उसके अपनों ने छला-सताया है।

किन्तु, कुन्ती की विशेषता इस बात में है कि प्रारब्ध को स्वीकारने की विवशता झेलने के बावजूद वह कभी पूरी तरह हारती नहीं, घुटना नहीं टेकती। न अपने विवेक को दाब पर लगाती है, न क्रोध को स्वयं पर हावी होने देती है और न सहिष्णुता और सजगता से क्षण भर को उसका नाता दूटता है। धर्म के प्रति उसके मन में कभी अनास्था नहीं जगती। किसी भी हालत में अधर्म से कुछ पाने का ध्यान नहीं आता। धर्म की तो साक्षात् मूर्ति है वह। दुःख ने कुन्ती को तोड़ा नहीं, बल्कि जोड़ा है, तराशा है। उसे आकार दिया है। चिन्तन की क्षमता दी है। विवेक का संबल थमाया है। एक ऐसी विलक्षण-जीवन-दृष्टि दी है, जिसके आलोक में उसने जाना है कि दुःख मानव को प्रभु से जोड़ता है। प्रभु स्मरण के लिए दुःख अनिवार्य शर्त है। यही कारण है कि जब साक्षात् नारायण श्री कृष्ण प्रसन्न होकर वर माँगने को कहते हैं तो कुन्ती कुछ और नहीं माँग पाती—दुःख माँग लेती है—वह दुःख जो आत्मा को परमात्मा से जोड़ने का सेतु है। सुख में प्रभु विस्मृत हो जाते हैं। किन्तु, दुःख में उन्हें भूलना संभव नहीं होता। कुन्ती को वैसे कोई सुख

गैवारा नहीं जो परमात्मा को भूलने को विवश करें। परमात्मा ही इष्ट हैं। मानव जीवन का लक्ष्य सुखभोग नहीं, आत्मा को उसके अभीष्ट उच्चतम शिखर तक पहुँचाना है। उसकी गरिमा को धूमिल करना नहीं, बल्कि, उसको निखार कर प्रभु कुल की मान मर्यादा के अनुकूल बनाए रखना है। यही जीवन दृष्टि कुन्ती को महाभारत के अन्य पात्रों से अलग करती, विशिष्ट बनाती है। दुःख को कुहेलिका से अद्यांत आवेष्टित रहने के बावजूद उसकी कान्ति को छिपने नहीं देती। यही उसे यशस्विनी और प्रातः स्मरणीया बनाती है। परवर्ती रचनाकारों के लिए उसके उपजीव्य होने का कारण भी यही है। सब कुछ पाकर भी असिचन रहने की स्थिति ने उसे दूसरों को बहुत कुछ देने की स्थिति में पहुँचा दिया है। यदि—राम कथा में कवि बनाने की क्षमता है^१—तो कुन्ती कथा कवि और चिन्तक दोनों बनाती है। कुन्ती की ओर इस आशा से दृष्टि उठती है कि जीवन संघर्ष की सीढ़ियों पर चढ़ने का बल मिले। दुःख की घुंघ में से प्रभु की किरण देखी जा सके, उसे छूने पाने का प्रयास हो और मानव-जीवन के सही अर्थ बता दी जा सके।

यदुवंशी वसुदेव के पिता शूरसेन अपने निःसंतान मित्र और फुफेरे भाई भोजराज से अपनी पहली संतान देने की प्रतिज्ञा करते हैं। पहली संतान के रूप में पृथा का जन्म होता है। पूर्व प्रतिज्ञा के अनुसार वह राजा भोज को दे दी जाती है। पृथा कुन्ती बन जाती है। अपूर्व सुन्दरी कुन्ती अभी किशोरी ही है कि एक दिन कुंति भोज के दरबार में उग्र-स्वभावी ब्राह्मण ऋषि दुर्वासा का आगमन होता है। ऋषि भोजराज के यहाँ इस शर्त पर अतिथि होना चाहते हैं कि मेरी इच्छा के विपरीत यहाँ कोई कुछ नहीं करेगा—वृत्ति रहित मेरी सेवा होगी—मुझे कभी क्रोध करने का अवसर नहीं दिया जाएगा। राजाभोज ऋषि की इच्छा और शर्त शिरोधार्य करके अपनी शीलवती, धर्मचारिणी, सती साध्वी कन्या कुन्ती को उनकी सेवा में नियुक्त कर देते हैं। कुन्ती को ऋषि के क्रोधी स्वभाव से अवगत कराना और उनके रुष्ट होने से अपने वंश के नाश होने की बात बतलाना भी नहीं भूलते। कुन्ती एक वर्ष तक पूरे मनोयोग से शिष्या, पुत्री या भगिनी की तरह ऋषि की सेवा करती है। ऋषि प्रसन्न होकर वर माँगने को कहते हैं। कुन्ती ऋषि और पिता की प्रसन्नता को ही वर मान कर कोई दूसरा वर माँगने से सादर अस्वीकार करती है। किन्तु भविष्य द्रष्टा दुर्वासा उसे देवताओं को आह्वान करने का अथर्ववेद का मंत्र देकर बतलाते हैं कि तुम जब जिस देवता का स्मरण करोगी—वह उसी क्षण चाहे या न चाहे तुम्हारा सेवक सा हो जायगा और तुम उसके पुत्र की माँ बनोगी। शाप के भय से कुन्ती मन्त्र अस्वीकार कर नहीं पाती। ऋषि दुर्वासा प्रस्थान कर जाते हैं।^२

मंत्र के बलाबल के प्रति आश्चर्यभाव और कौतूहल कुन्ती को किसी देवता का आह्वान करने की प्रेरणा देते हैं। उसी मनःस्थिति में सूर्य का आह्वान करती है और सूर्य आविर्भूत हो जाते हैं।

१. हे राम तुम्हारा चरित स्वयं ही काव्य है।

कोई कवि बन जाय सहज सम्भाव्य है ॥

—श्री मैथिलीशरण गुप्त

२. महाभारत, वारण्यक पर्व—(कुण्डलाहरण-पर्व—२८७/१-३)

कुन्ती के आश्चर्य की सीमा नहीं रहती। वह भयभीत हो जाती है। सूर्यदेव से बार-बार अपनी बाल-बुद्धि के कारण उन्हें कष्ट देने के लिए क्षमा माँगती है। उनसे अपने लोक में लौट जाने की प्रार्थना करती है। किन्तु, सूर्य मनोरथ सिद्धि के बिना लौटना अशुभ-अहितकर बतलाते हैं। उसे, ऋषि दुर्वास और भोजराज को शाप देने को उद्भूत हो जाते हैं। उन्हें देवलोक में अपनी हँसी उड़ाये जाने की चिन्ता है और कुन्ती को शोषित होने की। विकल्पहीन स्थिति में कुन्ती अनचाहा स्वीकारने को विवश है। फलतः सूर्यपुत्र का जन्म होता है। लोकनिन्दा का भय अविवाहिता जननी के माँ नहीं बनने देता। कुन्ती अपनी धात्री के सहयोग से पुत्र को मोम से लिपटी सुन्दर कोमल टोकरी में लिटा कर रोते-रोते अश्वनदी में बहा देती है। वह टोकरी अश्वनदी चर्मवती, यमुना और गंगा में बहती हुयी चम्पापुरी में पहुँचती है। राजा धृतराष्ट्र के सारथी मित्र अधिरथ नामक सूत अपनी पत्नी राधा के साथ गंगा स्नान करने जाते हैं। वह टोकरी उन्हें मिलती है। सन्तानहीन दम्पति उस टोकरी के बालक को ईश्वर का प्रसाद समझ कर अपना पुत्र बना लेते हैं। सोने के कवच कुण्डल लेकर आनेवाला पुत्र वसुषेण कहलाने लगता है। कर्ण और वैकर्तन नाम तो बाद में पड़ते हैं।¹ कुन्ती को दूत से सारा वृत्तांत मालूम होता है। महाभारत कुन्ती को तब भी कुमारी बतलाता है।² विद्वान विवाद में पड़ गए हैं।³ किन्तु वस्तुतः कुन्ती का यह कौमार्य तन का नहीं मन का है। सूर्य से अनचाहे संभोग और अयादित पुत्र से मानसिक कौमार्य खंडित हो भी नहीं सकता। कुन्ती ने न सूर्य को अपना पति माना था न सूर्यपुत्र की कामना की थी। वह तो एक दुर्घटना थी, जो कुन्ती को माध्यम बना कर घट गई। कुन्ती कुँआरी-क्री-कुँआरी बनी रही। सब कुछ साक्षी भाव से देखती रही।

बाद में परम्परा के अनुरूप राजा कुंतिभोज कुन्ती के लिए स्वयंवर का आयोजन करते हैं। हजारों राजाओं में से महाबली विक्रमी पाण्डु को कुन्ती वरमाला पहना देती है। पहली बार कुन्ती को अपनी इच्छा से कुछ चुनने का अवसर मिलता है। किन्तु, नियति नहीं अन्तरिक्ष में उसके लिए कुछ और भीषण जाल बुन रखी होती है। विवाह के तुरंत बाद पाण्डु दिग्विजय के लिए प्रस्थान करते हैं। अनेक शत्रु परास्त होते हैं। अनेक राजा मित्र बनते हैं। शान्तनु का डूबता यश एक बार फिर पखान चढ़ता है। इसी क्रम में माद्री कुन्ती सी सपत्नी बन जाती है। कुन्ती आहत होती है। पर, न तो अपना असंतोष व्यक्त करती है और न कोई शिकवा-शिकायत।

युद्ध की थकान मिटाने के लिए पाण्डु, कुन्ती और माद्री के साथ कुछ दिनों के लिए वन विहार करने जाते हैं। वन में किन्दम नामक भृग ऋषि के शाप से उनके लिए स्त्री स्पर्श वर्जित हो जाता है। कुन्ती एकबार फिर ठगी जाती है। किन्तु, हारती नहीं। लेकिन पीड़ा से उबरने के लिए पारलौकिक पथ खोज लेती है। पाण्डु स्वयं प्रवज्या लेकर वन जाने और कुन्ती-माद्री के हस्तिनापुर

१. महाभारत, आरण्यक-पर्व—कुण्डलाहरण-पर्व—

२. महाभारत, आरण्यक पर्व (कुण्डलाहरण-पर्व २६२/४)

६. कल्याण, गोरखपुर, नवम्बर—१९८३ ई० पृ० १०६

लौटने का प्रस्ताव रखते हैं। कुन्ती उसे नहीं स्वीकारती। पति के साथ वानप्रस्थाश्रम में रहने की इच्छा व्यक्त करती है। माद्री भी उसका अनुकरण करती है। इस आशय की सूचना हस्तिनापुर भेज दी जाती है। राजसी वस्त्र-आभूषण भी भेज दिये जाते हैं। वन में विभिन्न ऋषियों से बार-बार यह सुन कर कि सन्तानहीन व्यक्ति पितृ ऋण से नहीं मुक्त हो सकता, पाण्डु के मन में पुत्र की कामना बलवती होती है। एक दिन एकान्त में कुन्ती से अपनी असमर्थता की चर्चा करते हैं और नियोग को शास्त्र सम्मत बतलाते हुए कई पौराणिक कथाओं और स्वयं अपने, धृतराष्ट्र तथा विदुर के जन्म का उदाहरण देकर सन्तान की चाह व्यक्त करते हैं। कुन्ती ने पति के रूप में सिर्फ पाण्डु को चाहा-स्वीकारा है। किसी अन्य की बात सोचना भी नहीं चाहती। किन्तु, पाण्डु की पुत्र कामना के समक्ष विवश हो जाती है। अन्ततः दुर्वास ऋषि की बतलायी पद्धति के द्वारा तीन देवों—धर्मराज, पवन और इन्द्र—से तीन पुत्रों युधिष्ठिर, भीम और अर्जुन की उत्पत्ति होती है। पाण्डु चौथे पुत्र के लिए आग्रह करते हैं, तो कुन्ती उसे धर्मशास्त्र विरुद्ध बतलाकर अस्वीकार देती है।¹

माद्री भी जननी बनना चाहती है। कुन्ती ने जिस नियोग को पति की हार्दिक अभिलाषा के दबाव में स्वीकारा था, माद्री स्वेच्छा से उसे पाना चाहती है। सपत्नी कुन्ती से प्रत्यक्ष कह नहीं पाती, तो पाण्डु से ही कुन्ती से कहने की प्रार्थना करती है। पाण्डु कुन्ती से कहते हैं। कुन्ती सहयोग करती है। माद्री के दो अश्विनी कुमारों से एक साथ दो पुत्र नकुल और सहदेव उपलब्ध होते हैं।²

पाण्डु ने कुन्ती को सदैव अहमियत दी है। निश्चय ही इसके मूल में कुन्ती का शील, स्वभाव, निष्ठा और विदेह भाव रहा है। किन्तु, माद्री का सपत्नी मन कारण नहीं देखता। परिणाम की आह से आवत है। सम्भवतः यही 'आह' माद्री को अचेतनतया, ऋषि-शाप की जानकारी के बावजूद, पाण्डु को अपनी ओर आकर्षित करने की अशुभ प्रेरणा देती है। यही पाण्डु की मृत्यु के तत्काल बाद वच्चों को दूर ही रूकने का आदेश देकर कुन्ती को पास बुलवाती है ताकि स्थिति देखकर कुन्ती को पति की मृत्यु की पीड़ा के साथ-साथ सपत्नी के प्रति पति के आग्रह का दंश भी झेलना पड़े और अंत में ही सही एक बार गहराई से कुन्ती को अपनी भाग्यहीनता का एहसास भी हो। होता भी है। कुन्ती के मुँह से अनायास निकल पड़ता है कि माद्री, तू बड़ी भाग्यवान है कि तुमने पाण्डु का आसक्त मुँह देखा है।³ कुन्ती के भीतर बहुत गहरे कुछ टूटता है। किन्तु, बाहर कोई आवाज नहीं होती न प्रतिशोध की आग जलती है, न प्रतिकार का प्रश्न उठता है। माद्री पूरे विश्वास से अपने पुत्रों को कुन्ती की स्नेह छाया में सौंप देती है। स्वयं से भी अधिक विश्वास है कुन्ती पर। किन्तु, जाते-जाते यह आघात करना नहीं भूलती कि पाण्डु मेरी ही कामना करते हुए स्वर्गीय हुए हैं, अतः मेरा ही उनके साथ गमन अपेक्षित है।⁴

१. महाभारत, आदि पर्व, ११४/६५-६६।

२. महाभारत, आदि पर्व ११५/१-२०।

३. महाभारत, आदि पर्व ११६/२१।

४. महाभारत, आदि पर्व, ११६/२३-२०।

यहाँ से कुन्ती के जीवन का दूसरा बीहड़ अध्याय शुरू होता है। वन के तपस्वीगण पाण्डु पुत्रों और कुन्ती को लेकर हस्तिनापुर आते हैं और धृतराष्ट्र को सौंप कर लौट जाते हैं। कुन्ती राजरानी होकर भी आश्रिता की तरह रहने को विवश है। पाण्डव शकुनि, धृतराष्ट्र और धृतराष्ट्र पुत्रों की आँख की किरकिरी हो रहे हैं। कुन्ती की 'जस-जस भीगे कामरी तस-तस गाढ़ो होय' वाली स्थिति है। वह ज्यों-ज्यों राजनीतिक दाव-पेच और साजिश की शिकार होती है, उसके व्यक्तित्व का इस्पाती पक्ष आकार लेता जाता है। पाण्डव से उबरने के विविध पथ खोजे जाते हैं। कभी लाक्षागृह में जलाने का प्रयत्न होता है। कभी छल से जूए में पराजित करके द्रौपदी और पाण्डव का अपमान किया जाता है। कभी तेरह वर्षों के लिए पाण्डव कुन्ती से दूर वन जाने को विवश किये जाते हैं। इसके बावजूद कुन्ती हार नहीं मानती। अपने पुत्रों के दुःख का कारण अपना भाग्य दोष मान कर उन्हें प्रबोधती है।¹ अपनी सन्तान की जय का दृढ़ विश्वास लेकर एक-एक दिन काटती है। उसके विश्वास के दो मुख्य स्तम्भ हैं पाण्डव की अखंड एकता और मानवीय धर्म-कर्म में गहरी आस्था। स्थिति की प्रतिकूलता और दयनीयता के बावजूद पाण्डव को उसने इस तरह एक दूसरे से जोड़ा है कि वे एक माला के मनके हो गये हैं। माद्री के पुत्रों और अपने पुत्रों में उसने कभी कोई अन्तर किया है तो यही कि छोटा होने के कारण सहदेव को विशेष संरक्षण दिया है, उसी की विशेष चिन्ता की है और वन गमन के समय द्रौपदी को भी उस पर विशेष ध्यान देने की सलाह देती है² गरीब ब्राह्मण परिवार पर विपत्ति आने पर अपने पुत्र भीम को राक्षस के पास भेज देती है।³ यातना के चरम शिखर पर पहुँचकर भी अपने पुत्रों को यही शुभ संदेश भेजती है कि ऐसा कोई काम न करना जिसमें धर्म का लोप हो या छल का सहारा लिया गया हो

‘अविलोपेन धर्मस्य, अनिकृत्या परंतप ।’⁴

जीवन जीने के विलक्षण अंदाज ने कुन्ती को एक पात्र की सीमा से उठाकर सिद्धान्त का विस्तार किया है। कृष्ण ने कुरुक्षेत्र के मैदान में मोहान्ध अर्जुन को कर्म का उपदेश बाद में दिया है, कुन्ती ने कृष्ण के माध्यम से अपने वन-वन भटक रहे पुत्रों को कर्मण्यता का संदेश पहले भेजा है।⁵ कुन्ती का यह संदेश “पुत्र ! तुम.....क्षत्रिय हो अपने धर्म को पहचानो.....समय को मत देखो.....राजपुत्र समय पलट दिया करते हैं.....पर पिंड जीवी होकर मत रहो.....मैं तुम्हारा लम्बा जीवन नहीं चाहती.....ज्वलन्त जीवन चाहती हूँ.....पौरुष का प्रताप बढ़ाओ आदि-आदि उसके जीवन-दर्शन का निचोड़ है और यही गीता की पूर्व पीठिका भी है।

1. महाभारत, सभापर्व ७०/१५।

2. महाभारत, सभापर्व ७०/८।

3. महाभारत, आदिपर्व १४५/१४६।

4. महाभारत, ६०/१०२।

5. श्रु० ६०/१६५/३, श्रु० ६०/१७६/१।

युद्ध में पाण्डव की विजय होती है। युधिष्ठिर सम्राट बनते हैं। धृतराष्ट्र और गांधारी वानप्रस्थ आश्रम में जा रहे हैं। कुन्ती भी उनकी सेवा के लिए साथ हो लेती है। जिन्होंने कदम-कदम पर शत्रुता की और जीवन को काँटों से भर दिया, उनके प्रति कुन्ती का यह आचरण अवाक् और नतमस्तक कर देता है।

गांधारी, धृतराष्ट्र, कुन्ती और संजय दावानल में घिर गये हैं। धृतराष्ट्र संजय को शीघ्र निकल जाने का आदेश देते हैं और शेष के लिए निकलना न संभव रहता है न किसी को इसकी आवश्यकता महसूस होती है। जीवन के अन्तिम पड़ाव पर पहुँच कर कुन्ती पाण्डु को मन ही मन प्रणाम करके अग्नि को समर्पित हो जाती है। तेज से तेज का सम्मिलन होता है। जो जीवन परहित में दान से शुरू हुआ था वह अन्त-अन्त तक उसी धूरी पर चल कर भारत की महान पंच-कन्याओं की सूची में दर्ज हो जाता है।



देवी द्रौपदी

डॉ० आरती श्रीवास्तव, पी-एच० डी०

प्राध्यापिका दर्शन विभाग, लोक महाविद्यालय, बनियापुर, सारण

कुलीन राजवंश की कन्या, पाण्डव जैसे वीर राजाओं की पत्नी, महाराज पाण्डु की पुत्रवधू, धृष्टद्युम्न जैसे पराक्रमी भाई की बहन, अयोनिजा यज्ञप्रसूता द्रौपदी की गणना पुराणों में उन पंच-कन्याओं में की गयी है, जिनके नित्य प्रातःस्मरण से अभीष्ट कामनाओं की प्राप्ति होती है और पुण्यलाभ होता है—

अहत्या द्रौपदी तारा कुन्ती मन्दोदरी तथा ।

पञ्चकं ना स्मेरन्नित्यं महापातकनाशनम् ॥

ऐसी क्या विशेषता है इस द्रौपदी में ? भारतीय समाज की रचना के मूल में धर्म, अध्यात्म और कर्त्तव्य की प्रधानता रही है। यहाँ लौकिक आकांक्षा और सुख-विलास के लिए कोई स्थान नहीं है। यह त्याग और उत्सर्ग का समाज है। इसकी नींव कर्त्तव्य और धर्म के ऊपर ही स्थापित की गयी है। इसमें वैयक्तिक सुखों और आकांक्षाओं के लिए मर मिटना ही इसकी मर्यादा है। अर्थात् इस समाज में जितने भी प्राणी हैं उनके पद और स्थान का निश्चय उनके मानवीय कर्त्तव्यों और धर्म के ही आधार पर किया गया है। व्यक्ति अपने कर्त्तव्य और धर्म के अनुसार ही तर से नारायण में प्रतिष्ठित होता है। किंतु, इस कर्त्तव्य और धर्म की मर्यादा को प्रतिष्ठित करने हेतु समय-समय पर ब्रह्म और शक्ति का भी अभिन्न अवतरण हुआ करता है।

पुरुषार्थ और शक्ति का कुछ ऐसा ही अभिन्न अवतरण महाभारत-काल में दीख पड़ता है जिसके नायक हैं भगवान् श्रीकृष्ण और नायिका देवी द्रौपदी। कृष्ण और कृष्णा का संबंध विश्व-साहित्य में बेमिसाल है। दूसरे शब्दों में श्रीकृष्ण-भक्ति का ही नाम द्रौपदी है। जिसे द्रौपदी मिलती है, भगवान् को उसका सारथि होना पड़ता है।

देवी द्रौपदी पाञ्चालनरेश राजा द्रुपद की अयोनिजा पुत्री थी। याज्ञ एवं उपयाज्ञ नामक ऋषियों की सहायता से द्रुपद ने 'पुत्रकामेष्टि-यज्ञ' का अनुष्ठान किया। उस यज्ञान्ति से धृष्टद्युम्न तथा द्रौपदी का आविर्भाव हुआ। यज्ञ से उत्पन्न होने के कारण यह अयोनिजा तथा याज्ञसेनी भी कहलाती है। पाञ्चाल-नरेश की पुत्री होने से पाञ्चाली तथा श्यामाङ्गी होने से 'कृष्णा' नाम से भी जानी जाती है। जन्म के समय आकाशवाणी ने कहा था—देवताओं का कार्य सिद्ध करने के लिये,

अत्रियों के संहार के उद्देश्य से इस रमणी-रत्न का जन्म हुआ है । इसके कारण कौरवों को बड़ा भय होगा ।

अकेले अर्जुन के द्वारा स्वयंवर में जीती जाने पर भी माता कुन्ती की आज्ञा से इन्हें पाँचों भाइयों ने व्याहा था । राजा द्रुपद को यह जानकर प्रसन्नता हुई कि ग्राह्य-वेश में स्वयंवर में आये पाँचों पाण्डव थे तथा मत्स्य-भेदन करनेवाले और कोई नहीं स्वयं अर्जुन थे, किंतु वह उन पाँचों की पत्नी बनेगी, यह जानकर उन्हें दुःख हुआ । इसी समय व्यासजी ने प्रकट होकर द्रुपद को पाण्डवों के धर्म, वायु, इंद्र तथा अश्विनीकुमारों और द्रौपदी के लक्ष्मी के अवतार का रहस्य बताते हुए कहा कि द्रौपदी को भगवान् शंकर का वर प्राप्त है कि 'वह पाँच पतियों की पत्नी बनेगी ।' पाँच पतियों के वरण की बात सुनकर द्रौपदी को जरा भी घबराहट नहीं हुई । किन्तु श्रीकृष्ण प्रिया देवी सत्यभामा को अवश्य घबराहट होने लगी । एक बार वन में भगवान् श्रीकृष्ण देवी सत्यभामा के साथ पाण्डवों से मिलने आये । उस समय बातों ही बातों में सत्यभामाजी ने द्रौपदी से पूछा—'बहिन ! मैं तुमसे एक बात पूछती हूँ । मैं देखती हूँ कि तुम्हारे धूरवीर और बलवान् पति सदा तुम्हारे अधीन रहते हैं; इसका क्या कारण है ? क्या तुम कोई जंतर-मंतर या औषध जानती हो ? अथवा क्या तुमने जप, तप, व्रत, होम या विद्या से उन्हें वश में कर रखा है ? मुझे भी कोई ऐसा उपाय बताओ जिससे भगवान् श्यामसुन्दर मेरे वश में हो जायँ ।' देवी द्रौपदी ने कहा—'बहिन ! आप श्यामसुन्दर की पटरानी एवं प्रियतमा होकर कैसी बात करती हैं ? सती-साध्वी स्त्रियाँ जंतर-मंतर आदि से उतनी ही दूर रहती हैं जितनी साँप-बिच्छू से । क्या पति को जंतर-मंतर आदि से वश में किया जा सकता है ? झोली-भाली अथवा दुराचारिणी स्त्रियाँ ही पति को वश में करने के लिये इस प्रकार के प्रयोग किया करती हैं । ऐसा करके वे अपना तथा अपने पति का अहित ही करती हैं । ऐसी स्त्रियों से सदा दूर ही रहना चाहिये ।

इसके बाद उन्होंने बतलाया कि अपने पतियों को प्रसन्न रखने के लिये वे किस प्रकार आचरण करती थीं । उन्होंने कहा—'बहिन ! मैं अहंकार और काम-क्रोध का परित्याग कर बड़ी सावधानी से सब पाण्डवों की और उनकी स्त्रियों की सेवा करती हूँ । मैं ईर्ष्या से दूर रहती हूँ और मन को कावू में रखकर केवल सेवा की इच्छा से अपने पतियों का मन रखती हूँ । मैं कटु भाषण से दूर रहती हूँ, असभ्यता से खड़ी नहीं होती, खोटी बातों पर ध्यान नहीं रखती, बुरी जगह पर नहीं बैठती, दूषित आचरण के पास नहीं फटकती तथा पतियों के अभिप्रायपूर्ण संकेत का अनुसरण करती हूँ । देवता, मनुष्य, गन्धर्व, युवा, धनी अथवा रूपवान्-कैसा ही पुरुष क्यों न हो, मेरा मन पाण्डवों के सिवा और कहीं नहीं जाता । अपने पतियों के भोजन किये बिना मैं भोजन नहीं करती, स्नान किये बिना स्नान नहीं करती और बैठे बिना स्वयं नहीं बैठती । जब-जब मेरे पति घर आते हैं, तब-तब मैं खड़ी होकर उन्हें आसन और जल देती हूँ । मधुर रसोई तैयार करती हूँ, समय पर भोजन कराती हूँ, सदा सजग रहती हूँ, घर में अनाज की रक्षा करती हूँ और घर को झाड़-बुहारकर साफ रखती हूँ । मैं बातचीत में किसीका तिरस्कार नहीं करती, कुलटा स्त्रियों के पास नहीं फटकती और

सदा ही पतियों के अनुकूल रहकर आलस्य से दूर रहती हूँ। सासजी ने मुझे कुटुम्ब संबंधी जो-जो धर्म बताये हैं, उन सबका मैं पालन करती हूँ। सत्यभाषण, पतिसेवा, भिक्षा देना, पूजन, श्राद्ध, त्योहारों पर पकवान बनाना, माननीयों का आदर करना तथा और भी मेरे लिये जो धर्म विहित हैं, उन सभी का मैं सावधानी से रात-दिन आचरण करती हूँ, मैं विनय और नियमों को सर्वदा सब प्रकार अपनाये रखती हूँ। मेरे विचार से तो स्त्रियों का सनातन धर्म पति के अधीन रहना ही है, वही उनका इष्टदेव है। मैं अपने पतियों से बढ़कर कभी नहीं रहती, उनसे अच्छा भोजन नहीं करती, उनसे बढ़िया वस्त्राभूषण नहीं पहनती तथा न कभी सासजी से वाद-विवाद करती हूँ। मैं सदा अपने पतियों से पहले उठती हूँ, तथा बड़े-बूढ़ों की सेवा में लगी रहती हूँ। सासजी कि मैं भोजन, वस्त्र और जल आदि से सदा ही सेवा करती रहती हूँ। वस्त्र, आभूषण और भोजनादि में मैं कभी उनकी अपेक्षा अपने लिये कोई विशेषता नहीं रखती। पहले महाराज युधिष्ठिर के दस हजार दासियाँ थीं। मुझे उनके नाम, रूप, वस्त्र आदि सबका पता रहता था और इस बात का भी ध्यान रहता था कि किसने क्या काम किया है। जिस समय इन्द्रप्रस्थ में रहकर महाराज युधिष्ठिर पृथ्वी पालन करते थे, उस समय उनके साथ एक लाख घोड़े और उतने ही हाथी चलते थे। इनकी गणना और प्रबंध मैं ही करती थी।

महाराज की जो कुछ आय-व्यय और बचत होती थी, उन सबका विवरण मैं अकेली ही रखती थी। पाण्डव लोग कुटुम्ब का सारा भार मेरे ऊपर छोड़कर पूजा-पाठ में लगे रहते थे और मैं सब प्रकार का सुख छोड़कर उसकी सँभाल करती थी। सत्यभामाजी ! पतियों को अनुकूल रखने का मुझे तो यही उपाय मालूम है।” धन्य है द्रौपदी और धन्य है उसकी पतिव्रता। आज के इस नवीन युग में जबकि परंपरागत मूल्यों का ह्रास शीघ्रता से होता जा रहा है, भारतीय नारी अपने कर्तव्य और धर्म से विमुख हो रही है, उच्च शिक्षा के अनेक सुअवसर, अधिकार और सुविधाओं का ज्ञान, वैयक्तिक सुखों का आकर्षण, नारी-जीवन सुधारने की महत्वाकांक्षा, राजनैतिक और सामाजिक जीवन में दिखाये हुए नये तत्त्व, आर्थिक समस्याओं का दबाव इत्यादि नाना कारणों से स्त्रियों के जीवन में प्राचीन काल से जो एक सन्तुलन था वह आज विचित्र हो रहा है—ऐसे समय में नारी को द्रौपदी के आदर्शों पर चलने की आवश्यकता है अन्यथा इन आदर्श विहीन द्रौपदी की रक्षा कोई कृष्ण नहीं कर सकता। कारण यह है कि भारत का व्यक्तित्व उसके शील पर आधारित है। सच्ची शिक्षा का अर्थ है शील-निर्माण। प्राचीन भारतीय नारियों में ऐसे मनोभाव रहने के कारण ही भारतीय समाज शताब्दियों से अडिग रूप से रक्षित हुआ है। जब कौरवों की सभा में दुष्ट दुःशासन ने इन्हें नंगी करना चाहा और सभासदों में से किसी की हिम्मत न हुई कि इस अमानुषी अत्याचार को रोके, उस समय अपनी लाज बचाने का कोई दूसरा उपाय न देख इन्होंने अत्यंत आतुर होकर भगवान श्रीकृष्ण को पुकारा—

गोविन्द द्वारिकावासिन कृष्ण गोपीजनप्रिय ॥

कौरवं परिभूतां मां किं न जानासि केशव ।

हे नाथ हे रमानाथ ब्रजनाथार्त्तिनाशन ॥

कौरवार्णवमनां मामुदरस्व जनार्दन ।

कृष्ण कृष्ण महायोगिन् विश्वात्मन् विश्वभावन् ॥
प्रपन्नां पाहि गोविन्द कुरुमघ्येऽवसीदतीम् ।

(महाभारत, सभापर्व ६८/४१-४४) ।

भारत के गौरव अर्थात् शील की रक्षा के लिए त्रैलोक्य का अधिपति नंगे पांव द्वारका से दौड़कर आया और धर्मरूप से द्रौपदी के वस्त्रों में छिपकर उसकी लाज बचायी । उपस्थित सभासदों ने भगवद्भक्ति एवं पतिव्रत का अदभुत चमत्कार देखा ।

द्युत की शर्त के अनुसार पाण्डवों को वनवास प्राप्त हुआ । द्रौपदी भी साथ में थी । जंगल में भी दुर्योधन ने द्रौपदी को अनेक कष्ट पहुँचाये । द्रौपदी का आतिथ्य स्वीकार करने के लिए दुर्योधन से क्रोध की साक्षात् मूर्ति दुर्वासा को ६० हजार शिष्यों के साथ भेजा, किंतु श्रीकृष्ण ने वहाँ भी द्रौपदी के कष्ट का निवारण किया । जयद्रथ ने पाण्डवों की अनुपस्थिति में द्रौपदी का अपहरण किया, पर वह पाण्डवों द्वारा पराजित हुआ ।

देवी द्रौपदी में क्षत्रियोचित तेज और भक्तोचित क्षमा—दोनों का अभूतपूर्व सम्मिश्रण दृष्टिगोचर होता है । द्रौपदी के जिन लंबे-लंबे, काले बालों का कुछ ही दिन पहले राजसूय यज्ञ में अवभृथ स्नान के समय मन्त्रपूत जल से अभिषेक किया गया था, उन्हीं बालों का दुष्ट दुःशासन के द्वारा भरी सभा में खींचा जाना द्रौपदी को कभी नहीं भूला । पाण्डवों का अज्ञातवास पूर्ण हो जाने पर वे द्रौपदी के साथ हस्तिनापुर लौट आये । श्रीकृष्ण तथा युधिष्ठिर ने दुर्योधन से मेल-मिलाप करने के लिये प्रयास करना चाहा । किंतु कौरवों द्वारा किये गये अपमान के बदले की भावना द्रौपदी के हृदय में शूल की तरह चुभ रही थी । उसने श्रीकृष्ण तथा युधिष्ठिर को फटकारते हुए कहा कि 'तुम्हारे पुरुषत्व को धिक्कार है । तुम सभी कायर पुरुष हो । यदि क्षत्रिय होते तो द्रौपदी राजसभा में इस तरह अपमानित न की गयी होती । अतः कौरवों के साथ संधि करने से तो मृत्यु का वरण कर लेना अच्छा है ।' दुःशासन द्वारा खींचे गये अपने बालों को दिखाते हुए द्रौपदी ने श्रीकृष्ण से कहा—'कृष्ण ! मैंने कौरवों के प्रति द्वेषाग्नि को तेरह वर्षों तक अपने हृदय में एक-एक साँस गिनकर इसी आशा से प्रज्वलित कर रखा है कि मेरे पति मेरे अपमान का बदला अवश्य लेंगे, किंतु मैं इस अग्नि में जली जा रही हूँ और तुम संधि-संधि चिल्ला रहे हो तथा युद्ध टालकर मेरे हृदय में उद्दीप्त अग्नि को शान्त करना चाहते हो ? कृष्ण ! पाण्डवों को सुना दो कि ऐसा होना असम्भव है । मैं क्षत्रिय राजा द्रुपद की कन्या हूँ, मेरी भी नसों में क्षात्र-तेज का उष्ण रक्त प्रवाहित हो रहा है । यदि युद्ध रोकने की चेष्टा की गई तो मेरे पिता द्रुपद तथा अपने पाँचों पुत्रों के साथ मैं स्वयं कौरवों से लड़कर अपने अपमान का ही नहीं, अपितु स्त्री-जाति के अपमान का बदला लूँगी । तभी मुझे शान्ति मिलेगी । यदि मैं युद्ध में मृत्यु को भी प्राप्त हो जाऊँगी तो भी मुझे इसका कोई दुःख नहीं होगा । अपमान का जीवन जीने से युद्ध में मृत्यु को वरण कर लेना अच्छा है ।¹

द्रौपदी यह जानती थी कि यदि संधि से दुर्योधन राज्य प्राप्त करेगा तो वह अनीति का ही समर्थक रहेगा और अनीति तथा अधर्म की स्थापना होना विनाश का मूल है। इससे भारतीय आर्य संस्कृति विध्वंस हो जायगी। इसलिए आततायी तथा अत्याचारी को अवश्य दण्ड मिलना चाहिए, अन्यथा अन्याय और अनाचार को आश्रय-प्रश्रय देने से दुष्टों को बल मिलेगा। जिससे न केवल स्त्री-जाति का अपमान होगा अपितु सारा मानव समाज कलङ्कित हो जायगा। यह था क्षात्राणी द्रौपदी के साक्रोश का चरम बिन्दु। अन्याय, अत्याचार तथा अधर्म, अनीति के समक्ष द्रौपदी कभी नहीं झुकी। द्रौपदी के उद्योग से महाभारत का संग्राम हुआ। भला, पतिव्रता पीड़ित नारी की हाथ किसको नहीं खा लेगी। महाभारत-युद्ध में जो कौरवों का सर्वनाश हुआ, उसका मूल सती द्रौपदी का अपमान ही तो था।

क्षत्रियोचित तेज के साथ-साथ भक्तोचित क्षमा भी द्रौपदी में अपूर्व था। अपने निरीह बच्चे, की हत्या अश्वत्थामा द्वारा सुनकर भीमसेन अश्वत्थामा के वध के लिए उद्यत होते हैं, किंतु द्रौपदी का हृदय द्रवित हो उठा और उसने कहा—‘यह गुरुपुत्र है। द्रोणाचार्य आपके गुरु हैं, इसलिये यह अवश्य है।¹ यदि इसका वध होता है तो कृपी भी मेरी ही तरह पुत्र-विलाप से व्यथित होंगी’—

मुच्यतां मुच्यताशेष ब्राह्मणो नितरां गुरुः॥

मा रोदीदस्य जननी गौतमी पतिदेवता।

यथाहं मृतवत्साऽऽर्त्ता रोदिम्यश्रुमुखी मुहुः॥२॥

सचमुच भारतीय संस्कृति के अनुसार आदर्श नारी सर्वप्रथम आदर्श माता है; बाद में है आदर्श पत्नी और इन दोनों ही आदर्श रूपों की जीवंत प्रतीक है भारतीय नारी देवी द्रौपदी।



१. (महा०, सौ०, अध्याय १५—१६)

२. (श्रीमद्भागवत, १/७/४३, ४७)

There has been enough of criticism, there has been enough of fault-finding, the time has come for the rebuilding, the reconstructing; the time has come for us to gather all our scattered forces to concentrate them into one focus, and through that, to lead the nation on its onward march.

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Let everyone follow his own religion..... A truly religious man should think that other religions are also so many paths leading to truth. We should always maintain an attitude of respect towards other religions. As you rest firmly in your own faith and opinion, allow others also equal liberty to stand on their own faith and opinion, when the grace of God descends, every man will understand his own mistakes.

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(ORISSA)**

One should not hurt others even by words. By indulging in rude words, one's nature becomes rude. One's sensitivity is lost if one has no control over one's speech.

THE HOLY MOTHER—SRI SARADA DEVI

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Have faith in yourself all power is in you — be conscious and bring it out. Even the poison of a snake is powerless if you can firmly deny it.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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TONNES....
AND
WE'LL DO IT
TOO"

It's the confidence of men who have discovered their own potential. They have set themselves higher and higher targets, year after year. And they have come out on top every time.

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STEEL AUTHORITY OF INDIA LIMITED

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- ☐ 63,550 "Tree Pattas" to equal number of beneficiaries involving 43,502 acres of land.
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LAND FOR LANDLESS

HOME FOR HOMELESS

IPRD. 409..D (information..211) 88-89

My ideal, indeed, can be put into a few words, and that is to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

M/S Rupnarayan Metal & Wire Industries

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Seek to live in harmony with all your neighbours and at peace with thy brethren. Peace and love should reign throughout the world.

CONFUCIUS

With best compliments from :

Janardan Parui

AMTALAHAT

KANYANAGAR

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(WEST BENGAL)

This life is short, the vanities of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

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AMTALA

P. O. KANNYANAGAR,

DIST. SOUTH 24-PARGANAS

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If you want to give up everything for your own salvation, it is nothing. Do you want to forgo even your own salvation for the good of the world? You are God, think of that.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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Maa Chhinnamastika Coke Industries (Pvt.) Ltd.

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M/S Radiohms Agencies

FREE PRESS LANE

RAJENDRA PATH

PATNA 800 001

Phone : 55220

I will go to hell cheerfully thousand times, if I can rouse my Countrymen immersed in Tamas and make them stand on their own feet and be inspired with the spirit of Karma Yoga.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

Vaishali Woolen & Textiles Mills Ltd.

D-11, INDUSTRIAL AREA

PATNA 800 013

Despondency is not religion, whatever else it may be. By being pleasant always and smiling, it takes you nearer to God, nearer than any prayer.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

M/S Rattanlall Tarachand

MAIN ROAD

RANCHI 834 001

India wants the sacrifice of at least a thousand of her young men—
men and not brutes.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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Be not a traitor in your thoughts. Be sincere; act according to your thoughts; and you shall surely succeed. Pray with a sincere and simple heart, and your prayers will be heard.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

With best compliments from :

M/S Asian Restaurant

MOSQUE ROAD,

DHATHKIDIH

JAMSHEDPUR 831 001

IDEAL CATERERS OF STEEL CITY

As a wind removes the clouds, so the name of God destroys the cloud of worldliness.

THE HOLY MOTHER— SRI SARADA DEVI

With best compliments from :

International Corporation
JAMSHEDPUR

Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

M/S Sheo Prasad Sheo Narayan
BISTUPUR
JAMSHEDPUR

फतुहा-फुलवारीशरीफ ग्राम्य विद्युत् सहकारी समिति लि०, पटना

प्रगति की ओर अग्रसर

1. राजस्व की वसूली

वर्ष 1987-88 5.49 लाख माहवारी (औसतन)

वर्ष 1988-89 10.00 लाख माहवारी (औसतन)

2. वित्तीय स्थिति सुदृढ़

3. फतुहा एवं फुलवारीशरीफ के अन्तर्गत 93 गाँवों के वाधित विद्युत आपूर्ति में से सिमरा, कंडास, मकसूदपुर, दौलतपुर, दरियापुर, नवादा, सिरापर एवं गोनपुरा की विद्युत आपूर्ति पुनः चालू की गयी। अन्य 85 गाँवों के वाधित विद्युत आपूर्ति को चालू करने के लिए वर्ष में 1989-90 में दृढ़ संकल्प।

4. कुटीर ज्योति स्कीम के अन्तर्गत वर्ष 1989-90 में कुल 400 व्यक्तियों को मुफ्त विद्युत संबंध दिया गया।

5. उपभोक्ताओं की बेहतर सेवा हेतु फतुहा एवं फुलवारीशरीफ के शहरी क्षेत्रों में माह मई 1989 से बिहार राज्य विद्युत बोर्ड के पेसू की भाँति स्पॉट बिलिंग की प्रक्रिया चालू।

6. शहरी क्षेत्र में विद्युत आपूर्ति की सुव्यवस्था के लिए सिर्फ फुलवारीशरीफ क्षेत्र में 10 नया सब-स्टेशन का निर्माण कर चालू किया गया।

7. वर्ष 1988-89 में कृषि एवं घरेलू विद्युत संबंध निर्धारित लक्ष्य से अधिक।

“समिति के हितों की रक्षा एवं उपभोक्ताओं की बेहतर सेवा” के लिए वचनबद्ध।

रामप्रीत सिंह
प्रबन्ध निदेशक

जेड० एस० हक
सेवा निवृत्त अध्यक्ष
बिहार राज्य विद्युत बोर्ड
प्रशासक।

You may try to increase your income, but in an honest way. The goal of life is not the earning of money, but the service of God. Money is not harmful, if it is devoted to the service of God.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

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Gram : VICTORY

He who has faith has all, and he who lacks faith lacks all. Remain always strong and steadfast in your own faith, but eschew all bigotry and intolerance. All religion are but so many paths leading to the same Truth. One should always maintain an attitude of respect towards other religions.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

With best compliments from :

M/S Ganga Sha Rameshwar

MANGTU RAM COMPOUND

SILIGURI

(WEST BENGAL)

Even the least work done for others awakens the power within; even thinking of the least good of others gradually instils into the heart the strength of a lion. I love you all ever so much, but I would wish you all to die working for others—I should be rather glad to see you do that !

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

M/S Arun Trading Company

BURDWAN ROAD,

SILIGURI 734 401

(WEST BENGAL)

STOCKIST : WAXPOL, EYE, T.V.S. BANI

Be unattached; let things work; let brain centres work; work incessantly, but let not a ripple conquer the mind. Work as if you were a stranger in this land, a sojourner; work incessantly, but do not bind yourselves, bondage is terrible.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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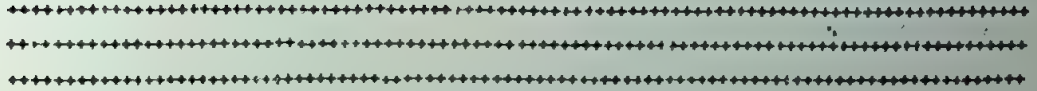
HOWRAH 672100/675655

EKDALIA 463167/428918

KADAMTALA 693272/693266

Whatever you think, that you will be. If you think yourselves
weak, weak you will be, if you think yourselves strong, strong
you will be.

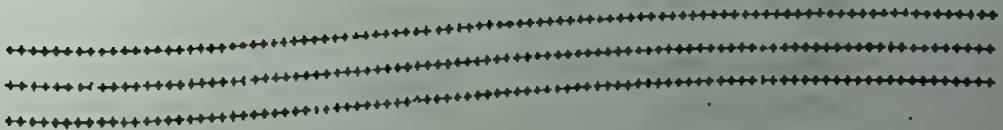
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA



With best compliments from :

**East India
Pharmaceutical Works Limited**

CALCUTTA 700 071



If a man has faith in God, then even if he has committed the most heinous sins—such as killing a cow, a brahmin or a woman—he will certainly be saved through his faith. Let him only say to God, 'O Lord, I will not repeat such an action', and he need not be afraid of anything.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

capacities. It is an apparatus for the state
dedicated energy + use for increasing state torque &
lower factor. Two types of capacitors. Static
capacitor & tuning cap. all used in
which plate motor.
bullet. Will be used for protection of
motor.

With best compliments from :

**M/S Shiva Sankar Chemical
Industries (Bihar) Limited**
BHAGALPUR

All power is within you; you can do anything and everything, Believe in that; do not believe that you are weak; do not believe that you are half - crazy lunatics, as most of us believe now-a-days. You can do anything and everything, without even the guidance of any one. All power is there. Stand up and express the divinity within you.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Three Phase motor

The rotating magnetic field induces a magnetic field in the rotor & rotor turns. In rotor squirrel cage induction motor & slip ring induction motor are used.

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It is not self starting motor. To start the motor starting winding is used. Split Phase capacitor ~~start~~ ~~motor~~ split & Repulsion motor is used its supply is 114V.

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LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI MARG

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Undertake only those works that present themselves to you and those also in a spirit to detachment. It is not good to become involved in many activities. That makes one forget God.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

With best compliments from :

M/S Mehra Export Corporation
KATRA HARI SINGH
AMRITSAR

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The calmer we are the less disturbed our nerves, the more shall we love and the better will our work be.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

M/S Deepak Engineering Company

21/A, CANNING STREET

CALCUTTA 700 001

Stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succour you want is within yourselves.

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IN

20 POINT PROGRAMME

(April—December, 1988)

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250.05 Lakh Mandays created under the National Rural Employment Programme, and 184.66 lakh Mandays created under the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme.

9,870 acres of surplus land distributed.

250 bonded labour rehabilitated.

1,82,253 Scheduled Caste/93,117 Scheduled Tribe families financially benefited.

2,410 problem villages given drinking water facilities.

22,012 House Sites allotted to the Homeless and 9,850 houses constructed and allotted under Indira Awas Yojna,

35,980 Families helped to improve environmental conditions.

1,019 villages electrified, 5,995 pumpsets energised.

2,23 crore trees planted, 2,302 Bio-gas plants installed.

1,57,320 persons sterilised under family welfare scheme.

161 mobile shope started under the Public Distribution system.

6,760 new Small Industries/Artisan units set up.

2 Community Health Centres, 22 Primary Health Centres and 134 Health Sub Centres opened.

6.75 Lacs Children enrolled under Primary Education and

12.83 lacs people educated under Adult Education Programme.

127 I.C.D.S. Blocks 12983 Agan Bari Centres Opened.

IPRD. 409 D (Information—211) 88-89.

BIHAR STATE SMALL INDUSTRIES CORPORATION LTD.

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- iv) Selling its own products (Traditional Furniture, "ASHOKA" Batteries for 4-Wheelers, Woollen Socks and Jerseys, Study Locks etc.) worth Rs. 229 Lacs in 1988-89 as against Rs. 103 Lacs in 1987-88.
- v) Total Turnover Rs. 2012 Lacs in 1988-89 against Rs. 1407 Lacs in 1987-88.

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OUR MOTTO- SERVICE WITH HUMILITY

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side.

RIG VEDA, 1-89-1

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- ☐ COMPLICATED JOB WORK

‘God is present in every Jiva, there is no other God besides that.
He who serves Jiva, serves God indeed.’

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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ELECTRICAL, WATER SUPPLY AND HARDWARE GOODS,
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**Ask nothing; want nothing in return. Give what you have
to give; it will come back to you.**

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Space donated by :

"The Jewellery Shop"

**HOTEL BODH GAYA ASHOK
P. O. BODH GAYA
DIST. GAYA**

Arise and awake. What matters it if this little life goes ?
Everyone has to die, the saint or the sinner, the rich or the
poor. The body never remains for anyone. Arise and awake
and be perfectly sincere.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

Kashmiri Handicraft

HOTEL BODH GAYA ASHOK

P. O. BODH GAYA

DIST. GAYA (BIHAR)

Ignorance is the mother of all the evil and all the misery we see.
Let men have light, let them be pure and spiritually strong and
educated, then alone will misery cease in the world, not before.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

M/S Mahanarayan Curio Shop

HOTEL BODH GAYA ASHOK

P. O. BODH GAYA

DIST. GAYA (BIHAR)

So long as there is desire no real happiness can come. It is only the contemplative, witness like study of objects that brings to us real enjoyment and happiness.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

M/S Standard Printers

GAYA (BIHAR)

What I want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel, inside which dwells a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

M/S Indian Textiles,

15, GOLMURI MARKET

MAIN ROAD

JAMSHEDPUR 831 003

Residence Ph. 24235 : Shop Ph. 27035

I do not believe in a religion or god which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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B SECTOR MARKET

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Phone No. : 88333

We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

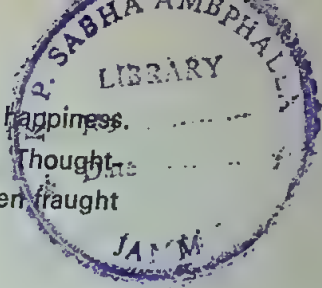
M/S Oswal Engg. & Chemical Co.

GOUSHALA CHOWK

JUGSALAI

JAMSHEDPUR 831 006

Enthusiasm leads to success. Enthusiasm is happiness.
Enthusiasm is always the driving force to all actions. Thoughtless and indiscreet actions result in failure and are often fraught with danger.



RAMAYANA

With best compliments from :

M/S Katihar Flour Mills (P) Ltd.

POST BOX NO. 21, BINODPUR

KATIHAR 854 105 (BIHAR)

Be not afraid of anything. You will do marvellous work. The moment you fear; you are nobody.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

Indian Concrete & Allied Products

MANUFACTURER OF PRE-STRESS CONCRETE PRODUCTS

Opposite : A. N. COLLEGE

BORING ROAD

PATNA 800 013

Phone : 62184

Either in this world or in the world of religion, it is true that fear is the sure cause of degradation and sin. It is fear that brings misery, fear that brings death, fear that breeds evil. And what causes fear ? Ignorance of our own nature. Each of us is heir-apparent to the Emperor of Emperors.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

M/S International Corporation

GOLMURI

JAMSHEDPUR 831 003

(BIHAR)

True happiness comes to those who live at peace with their fellows. The aim of all should be to learn peace and live peacefully with all men.

LORD BUDDHA

With best compliments of :

Perfect Electric Concern Pvt. Ltd.

Head Office :

STATION ROAD

JAMSHEDPUR 831 002

Phone Nos. : 25825, 28745

Gram : ZEUS

Telex : 626/229

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This is only half the story. The rest is the fact the ELECTRA manufactures most of the other components that go into the making of a transformer. Each and every transformer is a result of latest technology and is designed to give troublefree service in the field. No wonder customers have blind faith in the quality of ELECTRA TRANSFORMERS.

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Individual requirements for special type of transformers are also undertaken for quick delivery.

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INDUSTRIAL AREA

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IMPORTANCE OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA IN THE WORLD HISTORY

Even now a hundred years after the birth of Narendranath Dutta, who later became Swami Vivekananda, it is very difficult to evaluate his importance in the scale of world history. It is certainly far greater than any western historian or most Indian historians would have suggested at the time of his death. The passing of the years and the many stupendous and unexpected events which have occurred since then suggests that in centuries to come he will be remembered as one of the main moulders of the modern world, especially as far as Asia is concerned, and as one of the most significant figures in the whole history of Indian religion, comparable in importance to such great teachers as Shankara and Ramanuja, and definitely more important than the saints of local or regional significance such as Kabir, Chaitanya and the many Nayanmars and Alwars of South India.

I believe also that Vivekananda will always be remembered in the world's history because he virtually initiated what the late Dr. C. E. M. Joad once called 'the counter-attack from the East'. Since the days of the Indian missionaries who travelled in South-East Asia and China preaching Buddhism and Hinduism more than a thousand years earlier, he was the first Indian religious teacher to make an impression outside India.

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Vedanta recognises no sin, it only recognises error, and the greatest error, says the Vedanta, is to say that you are weak, that you are a sinner, a miserable creature, and that you have no power and you cannot do this or that.

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We have wept long enough; no more weeping, but stand on your feet and be men. It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want. And here is the test of truth—anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually and spiritually, reject as poison; there is no life in it, it cannot be true. Truth is strengthening. Truth is purity. Truth is all knowledge. Truth must be strengthening, must be enlightening, must be invigorating.

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Man is man, so long he is struggling to rise about nature, and
this return return is both internal and external.

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ফোন নং ৪৬-৫০৫২

P. BANERJEE MIHIJAM
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Be humbler than a blade of grass, with fortitude more than that
of a tree, and forsake all pride while honouring everyone. First
practise the virtues in your own life and then preach them to
others.

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India has suffered long, the religion eternal has suffered long. But the Lord is merciful. Once more He has come to help His children, once more the opportunity to rise is given to fallen India, India can only rise by sitting at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. His life and his teachings are to be spread far and wide, are to be made to penetrate every pore of Hindu society.

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Work unto death—I am with you, and when I am gone, my spirit will work with you. This life comes and goes—wealth, fame, enjoyments are only for a few days. It is better, far better, to die on the field of duty, preaching the truth, than to die like a wordly creature. Advance !

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The Sat-Chit-Ananda likewise has many forms. The devotee who has seen God in one aspect knows Him in that aspect only. But he who has seen Him in manifold aspects is alone in a position to say : 'All these different forms are of one God and He is multiform.'

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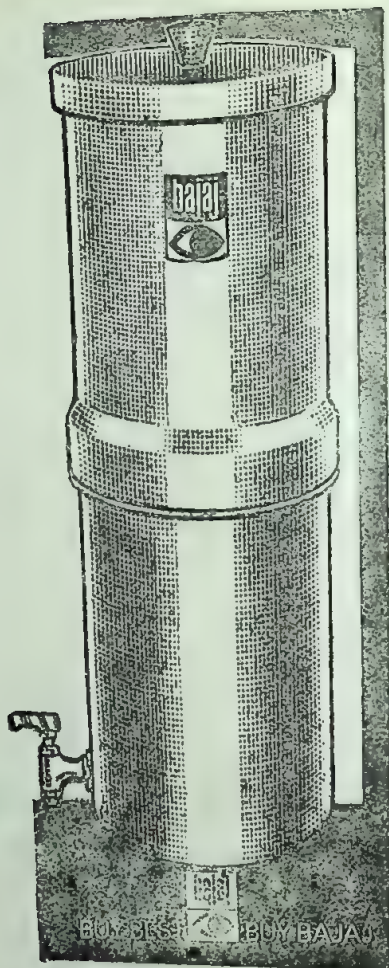
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Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep;
you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal.

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SWAMI VIVEKANANDA—A GREAT FIGURE IN HISTORY

Vivekananda was, as I said, profoundly moved by the realization of India's poverty and the state of her oppression under the British colonial rule. And he proposed a revolution. The spirit of this revolution enormously influenced Gandhi and influences Indian political thought to this day. Vivekananda in this sense is a great figure in Indian history, one of the very greatest historical figures that India has ever produced. But it must always be noted that Vivekananda's revolution, Vivekananda's nationalism, were not like the kind of revolution, the kind of nationalism, which we associate with other great leaders, admirable and noble as they may be, Vivekananda was far greater than that. In fact, when one sees the full range of his mind, one is astonished. Vivekananda looked toward the west, not simply as a mass of tyrants exploiting various parts of Asia, and other undeveloped areas, but as future partners, people who had very, very much to offer. At the same time, without any false humility, he faced the west and said "we have fully as much and more to offer you. we offer you this great tradition of spirituality, which can produce, even now, today, a supremely great figure such as Ramakrishna. You can offer us medical services, trains that run on time, hygiene, irrigation electric light. These are very important, we want them, and we admire some of your qualities immensely."

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

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Speak the truth; do not yield to anger; give even though you have but a little to give. One should be faithful to one's duty at all times regardless of the situation. Faithfulness to duty brings the greatest of rewards. Obedience is the way to the good things of this life.

BUDDHA

With best compliments from :

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SOUTH GAI GHAT

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A day once gone will never return. Therefore, one should be diligent each moment to do good. We reach the goal of the good life by pious work.

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Difficulties come, but they do not last for ever. You will see that they pass away like water under a bridge.

THE HOLY MOTHER—SRI SARADA DEVI

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Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man.
Religion is being and becoming.

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You cannot believe in God until you believe in yourself.

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Whosoever desireth his own well-being should cast away anger,
conceit, deceit and lust. For these four aggravate sin.

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Stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility
on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of
your own destiny. All the strength and succour you want is
within yourselves.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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You see many stars in the sky at night, but not when the sun rises. Can you therefore say that there are no stars in the heavens during the day? O man, because you cannot find God in the days of your ignorance, say not that there is no God.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

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Truth is the foundation of all merit and virtue.

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He whose actions are free from the hankering for desires,
whose actions have been burnt by the fire of knowledge, him
the wise call a sage.

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SRI RAMAKRISHNA—THE SYMPHONY OF INDIA

I am bringing to Europe, as yet unaware of it, the fruit of a new autumn, a new message of the Soul, the symphony of India, bearing the name of Ramakrishna. It can be shown (and we shall not fail to point out) that this symphony, like those of our classical masters, is built up of a hundred different musical elements emanating from the past. But the sovereign personality concentrating in himself the diversity of these elements and fashioning them into a royal harmony, is always the one who gives his name to the work, though it contains within itself the labour of generations. And with his victorious sign he marks a new era.

The man whose image I here evoke was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people. Although he has been dead forty years, his soul animates modern India. He was no hero of action like Gandhi, no genius in art or thought like Goethe or Tagore. He was a little village Brahmin of Bengal, whose outer life was set in a limited frame without striking incident, outside the political and social activities of his time. But his inner life embraced the whole multiplicity of men and Gods. It was a part of the very source of Energy, the Divine Shakti, of whom, Vidyapati, the old poet of Mithila, and Ram Prasad of Bengal sang.

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The only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls, and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship.

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May we follow the path of goodness as the sun and the moon follow their path. May good thoughts come to us from every side—pure, unobstructed, overflowing. May we, with our ears hear what is good and with our eyes see what is good.

RIG VEDA

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By purifying all knowledge, by forsaking folly and delusion
and by destroying likes and dislikes ye can realise the moksha
(the final liberation) which is all bliss.

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- ii) Absence of jealousy and suspicion.
- iii) Helping all who are trying to be good and do good.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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PLASTIC CAPS & CONTAINERS**

Where should you go to seek for God ?
Are not all the poor, miserable, the weak Gods ?
Why not worship them first ?
Why go to dig a well on the shores of the Ganga ?
Let these people be your God—think of them, work for them,
pray for them incessantly —the Lord will show you the way.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA



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DR. S. RADHAKRISHNAN

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TO A FRIEND

Listen, friend, I will speak my heart to thee;
I have found in my life this truth supreme
Buffeted by waves, in this whirl of life
There's one ferry that takes across the sea.

Formulas of worship, control of breath,
Science, philosophy, systems varied,
Relinquishment, possession and the like,
All these are but delusions of the mind—
Love, Love—that's the one thing the sole treasure.

From highest Brahman to the yonder worm
And to the very minutest atom,
Everywhere is the same God, the All Love;
Friend, offer mind, soul, body at their feet.

These are His manifold forms before thee,
Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God?
Who loves all beings, without distinction,
He indeed is worshipping best his God.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

With best compliments from :

Sen and Lall

ARCHITECTS & ENGINEERS

GANDHI MAIDAN

PATNA

The magnetic needle always points to the north, and hence it is that sailing vessel does not lose her direction. So long as the heart of man is directed towards God, he cannot be lost in the ocean of worldliness.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

With best compliments from :

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You see the faults of others even if they are as small as a grain of mustard, but you do not want to see your own faults even if they are as big as the bilva fruit. Do not do to others what is disagreeable to yourself; that is virtue.

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हरपल — हर दम

बिहार राज्य कृषि विपणन पर्वद, पटना

हमारा उद्देश्य :

1. कृषि उपज की खरीद-बिक्री को सरल-सुन्दर एवं वैज्ञानिक ढंग से सुव्यवस्थित करना ।
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Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith, faith in God—this is the secret of greatness. If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have now and again introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong; that is what we need.

Be not afraid of anything. You will do marvellous work. The moment you fear, you are nobody. It is fear that is the great cause of misery in the world. It is fear that is the greatest of all superstitions. It is fear that is the cause of our woes, and it is fearlessness that brings heaven even in a moment. Therefore, "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached".

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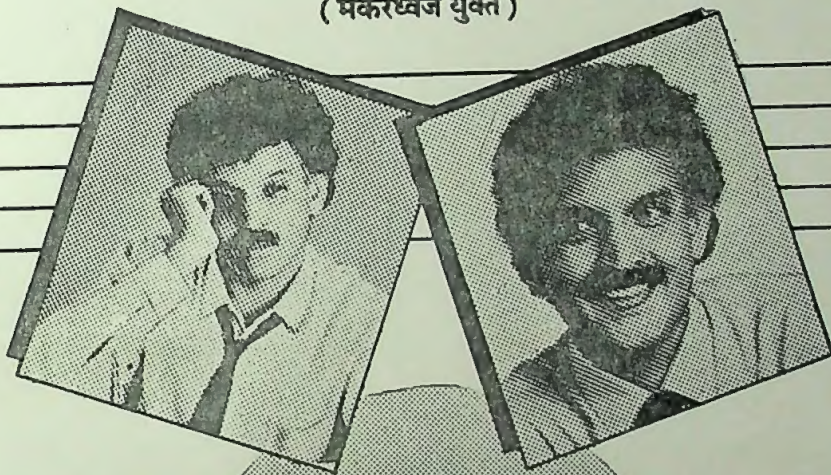
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तेजी से आगे बढ़ते जाइये।
बैद्यनाथ स्पेशल च्यवनप्राश में है,
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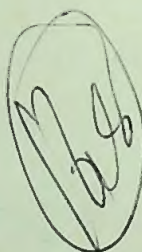


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"The sun's light falls equally on all surfaces, but only bright surfaces like water, mirrors, and polished metals can reflect it fully. In like manner, although God abides in all, He manifests Himself in the hearts of the pious."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA



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